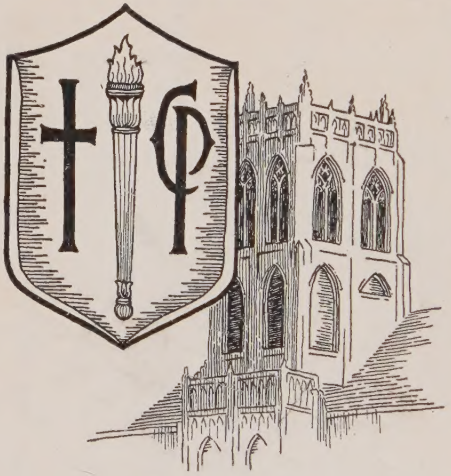
THE FARMER'S WIFE

EDEN PHILLPOTTS



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THE FARMER'S WIFE

By the same Author

THREE PLAYS

The Secret Woman
The Shadow
The Mother

In one volume, or separately

CURTAIN RAISERS. *Plays in one Act*

DEVONSHIRE CREAM. A Comedy

THE BLUE COMET

YELLOW SANDS. A Comedy

By EDEN and ADELAIDE PHILLPOTTS

College of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif.

THE FARMER'S WIFE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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3 HENRIETTA STREET, LONDON, W.C.2

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CHARACTERS

SAMUEL SWEETLAND, Master of Applegarth Farm
HENRY COAKER
RICHARD COAKER, his nephew
GEORGE SMERDON
VALIANT DUNNYBRIG
THE REV. SEPTIMUS TUDOR
DOCTOR RUNDLE
CHURDLES ASH
MR GREGSON
TEDDY SMERDON

ARAMINTA DENCH
THIRZA TAPPER
PETRONELL SWEETLAND, } Samuel Sweetland's daughters
SIBLEY SWEETLAND, }
LOUISA WINDEATT
MARY HEARN
SARAH SMERDON, the mother of George Smerdon
SUSAN MAINE
SOPHIE SMERDON
MRS RUNDLE
THE HON. MRS TUDOR

Acts I. and III. take place at Applegarth Farm
Act II. at the villa residence of Miss Thirza Tapper

CAST OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION OF

THE FARMER'S WIFE

AT THE BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE,
ON SATURDAY, 11TH NOVEMBER 1916.

SAMUEL SWEETLAND . .	Joseph A. Dodd.
HENRY COAKER . . .	William Armstrong.
RICHARD COAKER . .	Felix Aylmer.
GEORGE SMERDON . .	Noel Shammon.
VALIANT DUNNYBRIG . .	Frank Moore.
REV. SEPTIMUS TUDOR . .	Frank D. Clewlow.
DR RUNDLE . . .	Alfred J. Brooks.
CHURDLES ASH . . .	William J. Rea.
MR GREGSON . . .	Dennis King.
TEDDY SMERDON . . .	William M'Nil.
ARAMINTA DENCH . .	Mary Raby.
THIRZA TAPPER . . .	Cathleen Orford.
PETRONELL SWEETLAND . .	Cecily Bryne.
SIBLEY SWEETLAND . .	Betty Pinchard.
LOUISA WINDEATT . .	Margaret Chatwin.
MARY HEARN . . .	Isabel Thornton.
SARAH SMERDON . . .	Maud Gill.
SUSAN MAINE . . .	Dorothy Taylor.
SOPHIE SMERDON . . .	Helena Pickard.
MRS TUDOR . . .	Hilda Vane.
MRS RUNDLE . . .	Nancy Staples.

Produced by A. E. DRINKWATER.

Music to song in Act II. by
LAWRENCE HANRAY.

ACT 1

SCENE.—*The house-place of Applegarth Farm in the village of Little Silver. A roomy and spacious kitchen with buff-washed walls, a deep fireplace and range and bright windows, with leaded panes and large embrasures. A dresser stands to the right upon which white and blue crockery is placed; along the high mantelshelf are bright tins and brass candlesticks; above it is a gun-rack with guns and whips. A great pair of bellows hangs by the hearth. Elsewhere stands a 'Grandfather's Clock' with bright, brass warming-pans hanging on each side of it. Cream pans stand on the floor, a couple of easy-chairs flank the hearth, and there are other kitchen chairs disposed in the room. A large kitchen table stands between the windows, and a few bright pictures and almanacs hang on the walls. There are doors opening to the right and left. The right-hand door is the entrance; the left-hand door communicates with the house.*

[ARAMINTA DENCH *and* CHURDLES ASH *discovered. He stands by the fireplace and oils the breech of a gun; she sits under the window plucking a fowl.*

ASH. There's marriage in the air, Araminta Dench, and us that have escaped the state be often quickest to see the fatal signs.

ARAMINTA. Grapes are sour, Churdles Ash.

ASH. No, no. I've always been very interested in married people since I was fifteen year old, when father kicked me out of doors for trying to show him how to manage mother. Love did ought to be got over early in life. To see an old man in love be worse than seeing him with the whooping-cough.

ARAMINTA. The master's not old and he's not in love.

ASH. Why can't he bide a widow man? He's had his dose.

ARAMINTA. He was happy and wants to be happy again.

ASH. How do you know he was happy? Married people hide the truth for very shame. Marriage don't alter women—nothing alters 'em. They change their clothes—not their claws.

ARAMINTA. You talk as if you'd got a scratch or two. Yet there's something magical in the married state. It have a beautiful side.

ASH. So have the moon; but there's another side we never see.

ARAMINTA. That may be beautiful too. You'll hear married people going on sometimes, raging and saying such cruel, bitter things, and threatening to throw the house out of the windows; and you'll think 'tis all over with 'em and the end of their happiness; and then, come presently, they bob up

again, jogging along as peaceful and contented as a pair of ponies.

ASH. Yes, marriage breaks 'em in, and breaks their hearts too. Holy matrimony's a proper steam-roller for flattening the hope out of man and the joy out of woman.

ARAMINTA. No, no. Some are built for it. Mr Sweetland's the very pattern of a good husband. He's only got to drop the handkercher, I reckon.

ASH. No doubt he thinks so. There's no man better pleased with his own cleverness than our man. Please God, if he ventures, he'll find one of the mild and gentle sort. We've got enough fireworks here as 'tis.

ARAMINTA. Petronell ?

ASH. As proud as a turkey-cock, she is !

ARAMINTA. And pretty as a picture. A right to be proud—such a fine thing as her. But she won't be here much longer.

ASH. George Smerdon's after her.

ARAMINTA. And Dicky Coaker—very nice young men both ; and they don't live in the public-house, like George Smerdon's brother, Tom, and a good few others.

ASH. Beer-drinking don't do half the harm of love-making. For why ? Drink's a matter between a man and himself. Love's a matter between a man and a woman ; and that means the next generation. If I was the Government I'd give the drunkards a rest and look after the lovers.

ARAMINTA. Petronell will take Dick, I reckon.

He'll have Henry Coaker's little farm when the old man drops.

ASH. They haven't got the brains of a sheep-dog between 'em.

ARAMINTA. I wouldn't say that. They be both in love, and perfect love casteth out sense—but only for the time being.

ASH. [*Putting gun under his arm.*] Bah! It makes me wild to see the men after the women. Poor things—the best of you—compared to us—sly, shifty and full of craft. But we be open and honest and straight, and say what we think and mean what we say. The difference between a man and a woman's the difference between a dog and a cat, Araminta.

ARAMINTA. So 'tis then—a dog can be happy on a chain—a cat's far too fine.

ASH. Black or white, tabby or tortoisehell—cats all! Not tame things; but wild, savage things—pretending to be tame—for what you can get. Marriage is your dreadful business; you be man-eaters and love-hunters at heart—the pack of you.

ARAMINTA. No woman ever hunted you for love, I reckon—or wanted to eat you, Churdles.

[*Rises with her bird and feathers.*

ASH. Oh yes, they have—plenty of 'em. Them what skim the cream off women keep bachelors. To marry be like jumping into a river because you're thirsty.

ARAMINTA. [*Looking out of the window.*] Here's one that never went love-hunting, I'm sure. Miss

Thirza Tapper's coming up the garden. I know what she wants.

ASH. Something for nothing—according to her custom. Nature don't give nothing for nothing; why should we? If she's seeking for favours 'twill be 'Miss Dench'; if she ain't, she'll just call you 'Minta.'

[*A brisk knock.* ARAMINTA *puts down her bird and goes to open the door.*

Enter MISS THIRZA TAPPER.

MISS T. Good afternoon, Miss Dench, and you, Mr Ash. This is most fortunate. Where's the family?

ARAMINTA. Round about somewhere, Miss Tapper.

ASH. We've been cutting corn, and I've just come for a gun, because there's a dozen rabbits in the midst of Nine Acres, and they'll bolt presently. Then I shoots 'em. [*Going.*

MISS T. Wait a moment. It's about my little affair—the party, you know.

ARAMINTA. 'Twill be a brave rally of neighbours, I hear. All the world and his wife have been invited, they say, Miss.

MISS T. Yes—twenty are coming, and possibly twenty-three.

ASH. How ever will 'e get 'em in the parlour to your villa residence?

MISS T. There is a French window that gives upon the lawn. Those who have had their refreshments

will pass out of the window to make room for those who have not. And I am here to ask a great personal favour—an immense kindness. Do you think, Miss Dench, that you could come and help Susan Maine with the tea things? It's the pouring out that will want brains. You must keep your head when you are pouring out at a party—so much depends on it. There will be both tea and coffee; and poor Susan——

ARAMINTA. I'll come and welcome.

MISS T. How good of you! How like you! You are the kindest woman in Little Silver—kindness made alive. I am going to use my famous Lowestoft china—you know: the wonderful blue and white set that I had when Mrs Ramsbottom died. It will be safe with you—if you can only stay for the washing-up afterwards. To hear Susan Maine at work on china—it strains one's religion almost.

ASH. She's my sister's niece, and a very nice young woman. You can't have a shining angel with wings for fifteen pound a year.

MISS T. True, Mr Ash; you can't have 'a shining angel with wings' for that money; but you can have an honourable girl, who respects her mistress's crockery. And I want you to come too. I want everything to go off well; but I have had no man-servant since my dear father died.

ARAMINTA. I am sure Churdles will lend a hand gladly.

MISS T. To borrow a friend's man-servant is not

derogatory on such an occasion. Dear Mr Sweetland won't mind.

Ash. I'm an outdoor man—not an indoor servant. I hate they indoor men. I blush for 'em and the ladies' maids and all that. Only babbies should be dressed and washed and have their hair done for 'em. To hell with the gowns a woman can't put on for herself! To hell with the men that can't shave their own chins and lace their own boots—that's what I say.

Miss T. I'm afraid you're a terrible socialist, Mr Ash. But just for once in a way—to stand at the door and announce the guests.

Enter Mr Samuel Sweetland.

Miss T. That's quite a man's work, and nobody could do it better, because you know every one of them.

Ash. Better ask the master.

Miss T. [*Shaking hands.*] How do you do, Mr Sweetland? I'm here begging for favours.

Sweetland. And granted they are, before you ask them. My dear, dead partner's best friend won't be refused anything in this house.

Miss T. How like you! It is Mr Ash. May he stand at the door and announce the guests at my little affair next month?

Sweetland. He shall come.

Miss T. And might he put on livery? You know my father's coachman always did.

ASH. If you mean that green coat with brass buttons as Billy Blades used to wear, I'd be lost in it.

MISS T. A touch will make it fit, Mr Ash.

SWEETLAND. They be got to the heart of the field, Churdles. Best to go if you want a rabbit.

[*Exit* CHURDLES ASH. ARAMINTA *turns and takes her chicken and follows* ASH *off.*

You mean to give a very grand party by all accounts. And I want for you to have a dish of my best red plums—they 'Victorias' from my cob wall. A rare crop this year.

MISS T. How kind—how generous! Fruit is always such an addition. It adds richness to a table.

SWEETLAND. They shall be there. We're all coming, of course; and if there's anything I can do to help——

MISS T. How like you; but I have everything planned. The famous glee-singers are coming from Plymouth. They will perform under the araucaria after tea is over. And I thought perhaps Sibley would give us one of her pretty songs?

SWEETLAND. Be sure she will. Is young Dick Coaker coming?

MISS T. He and his uncle, old Henry Coaker, will both be there.

SWEETLAND. That's right then. For between ourselves, Dick has been at Applegarth pretty oft of late.

MISS T. For a wife?

SWEETLAND. After my Petronell.

MISS T. She's a very handsome girl.

SWEETLAND. Like her father, they tell me. But she's proud—a thought fiery and masterful, you know. The grey mare will be the better horse when she weds.

MISS T. I see great changes coming at Applegarth. Your Sibley will soon get a husband too.

SWEETLAND. Sibley's a quiet little go-by-the-ground girl—not so dashing as her sister. But no doubt she'll find her market; she's worth her keep to any man—in the dairy alone.

MISS T. You'll be lonely without them.

SWEETLAND. That's for others to decide. [*Looks meaningly at* MISS TAPPER.] 'Twas my dear, late partner's dying thought that I should take another in fulness of time. Always working for me to the end—always thinking of my comfort. She wandered just at the finish, and the very last speech she made to Minta Dench, half a minute afore she died was, 'See master's under-pants be put to the fire.' She perished with them beautiful words on her lips. And Minta's never forgotten 'em.

MISS T. How deeply affecting.

SWEETLAND. Yes—she earned Paradise, my Tibby did.

Enter SIBLEY SWEETLAND *and* GEORGE SMERDON.

SIBLEY. Here's George Smerdon, father—very wishful to see Petronell.

SWEETLAND. Oh dear—how be you, George?

[*Shakes hands with* SMERDON.] Best seek her, Sibley. I ain't seen her since dinner.

SIBLEY. [*To* MISS TAPPER.] I hope all goes on well for the party, Miss Tapper?

MISS T. Yes, all goes steadily forward, my dear. But there must be no loophole for a failure. You're all coming, and I know you'll sing if I want you to.

SIBLEY. I'm not clever enough to sing before such a lot of people.

GEORGE. Us be coming in our legions, you'll be glad to hear, Miss Tapper.

MISS TAPPER. [*Concerned.*] I—I only asked four, Mr Smerdon. Remind your dear mother that I only asked four. [*To* MR SWEETLAND.] Good-bye—good-bye. [*Shakes his hand.*]

SWEETLAND. Good-bye, Miss Tapper—till our next meeting, and I shan't forget the plums. Seek Petronell, Sib, and bid her come here to George Smerdon. [*Exeunt* SIBLEY *and* MISS TAPPER.

GEORGE. I hope you don't think none the worse of me, Mr Sweetland? I'm very wishful to please you, I'm sure.

SWEETLAND. Why not? Youth cleaves to youth —'tis nature. I can guess very well what you've come for, George; but I'm afraid——

GEORGE. I don't trust to myself, you must know. 'Twould be trusting to a broken reed in such a life and death matter as this. I don't come empty-handed, Mr Sweetland. My Uncle Peter's gone and left me a legacy.

SWEETLAND. Say no more, George. These things ain't in my ordering. You can't dictate to childer nowadays—least of all to girl childer. 'Tis they dictate to you. 'Twas very different when I was young. But the rising generation only plays for its own hand, and its own hand don't pat daddy's whiskers no more—'tis busy in daddy's pocket. We parents be a necessary nuisance to our children and that's all. They want everything and give nought back. They say we got 'em, and 'tis our bounden duty to buy 'em all the fun of the fair—give, give, give, and expect nothing in return. So whether I'm for you, or against you, don't matter a button.

GEORGE. But you wouldn't go so far as to say you was against me? Not when you hear about the legacy?

SWEETLAND. Take my advice, as a man pretty well thought of for brains, George, and don't name the legacy—not till after. If 'tis even three figures, don't name it. Don't drag in money, for 'tis the last thing that ought to weigh in such a ticklish business as love. Just offer man to woman, and put love first.

GEORGE. I daresay that's a very clever thought. To put love first be a great idea, I'm sure. And so I will then.

SWEETLAND. I don't say love first and the rest nowhere; but I do say love first and money in its proper place—just handy to round the corners and ease the strain and lift the burden.

Enter PETRONELL SWEETLAND *and* SIBLEY SWEETLAND.

PETRONELL. Well, George Smerdon, what's the matter with you?

SWEETLAND. He'll tell you—he'll tell you, Petronell. Give the man time. Don't push him. Come with me, Sibley. How's the corn stack lifting in the lower croft? It have got to be thatched afore Sunday.

[*Exeunt* SIBLEY *and* MR SWEETLAND.

GEORGE. May I sit down here, Petronell?

PETRONELL. Certainly—and keep that hat still. What the mischief should you want with me, George?

GEORGE. Well may you ask—well may you ask! 'Tis a most serious thing, and it can't go on, because it be coming between me and my work.

PETRONELL. All work and no play makes George a dull boy. I met your mother yesterday. She told me you'd got a bit of news for me.

GEORGE. A mother would put it like that. You know what pride my mother takes in me.

PETRONELL. Don't be doing that with your hat. It makes me giddy.

GEORGE. I've been patient as a toad, and you can't say I haven't; but now is the accepted time. I ain't the sort of man to bring red to any girl's cheeks—am I now?

PETRONELL. Not unless they grew red laughing at you.

GEORGE. I'm more likely to grow red afore them, than they afore me.

PETRONELL. Don't be such a fool, George.

GEORGE. That's what everybody says to me. But I've got the sense to know I'm a fool, and that's more than some of us have.

[PETRONELL *takes his hat away and puts it down.* May I take my coat off?

PETRONELL. Where's your manners?

GEORGE. Don't be so sharp, woman. I won't be spoke to like that. I'm here about a thing that only happens once in a lifetime, and I ban't used to work in my coat, and . . .

PETRONELL. Get on then. 'Twill be dark afore you've done.

GEORGE. I be coming to it as fast as I can. A chap have got his feelings. You don't plump out a question like this; you creep to it, if you're nice-minded. And here's a present for 'e to begin with —just a little dog. He only left his mother yesterday. [*Takes a little pup out of his pocket. It has a bit of red ribbon tied round its neck.*]

PETRONELL. You mean it kindly; but I hate dogs. [*She strokes the pup.*]

GEORGE. 'Twill grow into a very fine pattern of a dog. His mother's sister took a second prize to Plymouth last year. However—if you don't want him——

PETRONELL. You didn't come for that? [*Gives back the pup.*]

GEORGE. [*Putting pup back into his pocket.*] I

did not. Now, I daresay that some men, when they go courting, look for fat on a female and a mane of hair and such-like outside adornments. And some look for sense. And I be the sort that look for sense in a girl.

PETRONELL. Quite right, George. You'll want it.

GEORGE. Yes; but sense in a girl be as rare as white feathers on a blackbird. And that's why I've took to staring at you of late, with all the power of my eyes.

PETRONELL. Your eyes ain't a very speaking pair, I'm afraid, George.

GEORGE. I'm sorry you think that. But if they didn't tell 'e what I meant, more fools them. Now I be coming to it, so don't you miss a word. I've been in a proper uproar about you, Petronell Sweetland, for very near six months now—a proper uproar. It don't show outside, but inside here 'tis a burning fiery furnace; and if I could have trusted myself with pen and ink, like some people, I'd have done so. But a plough's my tool, and you can't make love with that.

PETRONELL. I didn't know you felt so deep, I'm sure.

GEORGE. Deep as a well. My heart be like Daniel's in the lion's den.

PETRONELL. Good gracious, George!

GEORGE. True as this hand. And I'll lie awake of a night for an hour at a time and watch the moonlight creep across the floor. In fact, I'm panting for 'e, Petronell; and God's my judge, I'd make such

a husband as ain't often seen. And one thing I must say: you could count on my being so faithful as death.

PETRONELL. I'm sure of that, George.

GEORGE. Oh yes; and on my money you could also count—every penny of it. I'd hand it over to you with a light heart. You should have the keys of everything.

PETRONELL. [*Rising.*] Don't say no more, George. [*Stoops and picks up his hat.*] 'Tis quite out of the question. There's a thousand good reasons against; but two will do. I don't love you, and I haven't got no use for you. I think you're a quiet, honest, good man and you'll marry a nice, quiet, pretty girl some day; but——

GEORGE. No, I shan't—no, I shan't. I shan't marry a nice, quiet, pretty girl. I don't want a nice, quiet, pretty girl. I want you. So you needn't go planning the future for me. I won't have that. If you don't take me, then none shall. Be quite clear in your mind there.

PETRONELL. You'll think better of it presently. You stick to work, and save a bit of cash, and forget all about me. You put sense above all else; and though I'm an ugly creature—

GEORGE. I never said that. I've nothing against your looks. They be quite good enough for me anyway.

PETRONELL. [*Giving him his hat.*] Thank you, George.

GEORGE. But it was your fine brains I was hanker-

ing after. That's where you shine most in my judgment; and if I ain't going to have 'e, I don't see what's the use of going on living. I—I—oh Lord, and I counted on it and dreamed about it.

PETRONELL. Well, don't cry about it.

GEORGE. [*Twisting his hat again.*] I ain't crying. I'm only down on my luck. You ought to have took a bit longer to say 'no.' But there—I might have expected this to-day [*puts on his hat*], for I saw a white rabbit in the rushes last night. Cuss they white rabbits: they always bring bad luck.

PETRONELL. Better luck next time.

GEORGE. You say that?

PETRONELL. Of course I do.

GEORGE. I hope you're right, then. For I ain't going to take 'no' for an answer. Don't you think you've done with me yet. I've only just started on you. If I'm a fool, I'll be a fool for something and not know when I'm beat. And there was the legacy and all. But what's the money to me now you won't handle it? Dust and ashes, of course.

PETRONELL. What legacy?

GEORGE. Sink the damned legacy! I'd have given it all to you, same as Uncle Peter gave it all to me—all he'd got in the world.

PETRONELL. Gave you all?

GEORGE. All. He didn't like brother Tom, because brother Tom's ways was too lively for him, and brother Tom never would stand to work.

PETRONELL. You must have pleased him, George.

GEORGE. Yes—'tis always that way. We can't

please them we want to please; but we can delight them that don't matter.

PETRONELL. How much might it have been, George?

GEORGE. Five thousand pounds—a lot of money they say. But I'd just so soon it was five thousand toadstools now.

PETRONELL. Five thousand pounds!

GEORGE. Yes. And they want for me to go to Canada, or some such outlandish place.

Enter SIBLEY.

No luck, Sibley. I've offered for her and she can't do with me. But 'tis only the first time of axing. If she's going on making my life a burden to me, then I'm going on making her life a burden to her. I'll haunt her, like a ghost from the grave.

SIBLEY. Lor, George!

GEORGE. I'm like that—one of they bulldog fools. Where I fastens on, I hangs on. And I be going to hang on till I've pulled her down!

[*Exit* GEORGE SMERDON.

PETRONELL. That simple creature's got five thousand pounds.

Enter ARAMINTA DENCH *with tea-tray, on which are butter, bread and a big plum cake. She gets table-cloth from drawer in the dresser and* SIBLEY *helps her to spread it. They take plates and cups from the dresser and prepare tea.*

PETRONELL. George Smerdon have got five thousand pounds, under his Uncle Peter's will, Minta.

ARAMINTA. My stars! He'll be the richest chap in Little Silver.

SIBLEY. Did he really offer for you, Petronell? That's the sixth then?

PETRONELL. The seventh. Fancy five thousand pounds! And no more use to him than it would be to a bird in a bush. His wife will have a soft thing.

ARAMINTA. I ain't so sure. Money often opens a man's eyes, if it don't turn his head.

Enter SAMUEL SWEETLAND.

SIBLEY. It don't mean his happiness, anyway.

PETRONELL. George Smerdon have come by five thousand pounds, father.

SWEETLAND. Five—! Good powers! Never!

PETRONELL. 'Tis true. I had it from his own lips.

SWEETLAND. I told him not to name it—till after.

PETRONELL. No more he did.

Enter CHURDLES ASH. *He carries the gun and a dead rabbit. He goes to his place at the table.*

SWEETLAND. Well, well—a Smerdon with money. Wonders never cease.

ARAMINTA. A very good young man, and steady as time. And Peter Hawke knew it.

[*They go to table.* ARAMINTA *cuts the bread and butter, pours out the tea and waits on them.*

ASH. He gave the money to George because he hated his brother Tom. And Tom's in a proper tear, and George—I've just passed him in the lane—and he looked more as if he was going to have a tooth out than get a fortune.

SWEETLAND. He'll be off, mark me, if you've said 'no' to him.

SIBLEY. He didn't seem to feel as if he'd done with Petronell.

ASH. The women will be after him, like cats after cream. Tea, Minta.

PETRONELL. He'll be off to Canada or somewhere presently.

SWEETLAND. A stubborn fashion of man—so like his father as two peas.

ARAMINTA. And proud of it.

ASH. More fool him, and I told him so backalong. We wasn't put into the world to imitate our fathers. Life ban't writing in a copy-book. Go your own way and make history, I told Smerdon not a week agone. Let them follow as can't lead, I said; and if you can't break free from your dead father's ideas and your live mother's apron-strings at your age—then there's no hope you'll ever set the sieve afire.

PETRONELL. What did he say?

ASH. He said he was quite contented with himself, and only hoped somebody else was.

SIBLEY. The people will rob him. He don't know the meaning of money.

ASH. Of course he don't. He'll go on touching his hat to a carriage and pair to his dying day.

SWEETLAND. You'd better set your cap at him, Sibley. 'Tis well known if a maid won't take a man, he often falls back on her sister.

PETRONELL. He don't want looks. Sense is what he's after—sense for his money. That's why he came to a plain, homely girl like me.

SWEETLAND. More tea and not so much milk, Minta.

ASH. [*Leaving table.*] And you'd best to bring two more jugs of cider to the harvest field. 'Tis a drouthy evening.

ARAMINTA. I've took two down an hour ago.

ASH. They're empty. [*Exit* CHURDLES ASH.

SWEETLAND. Did 'e tell 'em about the tarpaulin, Minta?

ARAMINTA. I told 'em.

SIBLEY. Have a bite yourself, Minta. Where's your cup? [*Gets cup for* ARAMINTA *from dresser.*

SWEETLAND. Five thousand! George Smerdon. [*Looks at* PETRONELL.] 'Tis a good bait on the hook, Petronell.

PETRONELL. I'm not the sort to be caught that way, father.

ARAMINTA. [*Going to fire with teapot and looking out of the window.*] Here's Dick Coaker coming in.

SWEETLAND. [*Pointing at* PETRONELL.] Ha-ha—there's one bait will catch 'e.

[PETRONELL *leaves table and runs off through door leading into the house.*

ARAMINTA. Did 'e see the rosen come on her cheeks?

SIBLEY. [*Rising.*] I'll be off out of the way.

SWEETLAND. You bide here and go to the door. She won't be a minute. She's only run to the looking-glass. You keep him till she comes down house again. And you be off to corn-field, Minta.

[ARAMINTA *nods. She is eating, and her mouth is full. A knock at the door.*

SWEETLAND. Let him in, Sibley. [*To* ARAMINTA.] Take your food to the wash-house and get out of their way.

[*Exit* SAMUEL SWEETLAND *into the house.* SIBLEY *opens the door and lets in* RICHARD COAKER.

RICHARD. May I come in ?

SIBLEY. Of course, Richard. How be you, then ?

RICHARD. Fine—and how's yourself ?

SIBLEY. Very clever, thank you.

ARAMINTA. Will 'e have a cup of tea, Richard ?

RICHARD. If 'tis all the same to you, Miss Dench.

[ARAMINTA *gets cup and saucer from the dresser.* SIBLEY *pours out the tea.*

ARAMINTA. I'll come back along presently to clear up.

[*Takes two heavy cider jugs from a corner and goes off. There is a lengthy silence.* RICHARD *looks at* SIBLEY.

RICHARD. A sweaty day—ain't it ?

SIBLEY. 'Tis hot.

RICHARD. A thunder planet reigning, I reckon.

SIBLEY. Thunder about for certain. [*Pause.*] Is

the tea to your liking? [RICHARD *looks at her and doesn't answer. Nervously.*] Be you going to Miss Tapper's spread?

RICHARD. Be you?

SIBLEY. Yes; we're all going.

RICHARD. She'll ax you to sing to the party.

SIBLEY. There's proper singers coming.

RICHARD. Your voice is so sweet as a chime of bells, I reckon.

SIBLEY. That's a pretty speech.

RICHARD. D'you like it?

SIBLEY. Petronell sings far better than me.

RICHARD. You're a liar. [*Pause.*] What did the men ought to wear? Market clothes, or Sundays? Uncle Henry says Sunday black.

SIBLEY. Why for not go in that brave grey suit you wore to Tavistock revel?

RICHARD. To think now you marked that! And you was rayed in sky blue with pink frill-de-dills round your neck.

SIBLEY. So I was then. You have got a memory. We put on our best gowns to please the men and tease the women. But only the women mark 'em most times.

RICHARD. Shall 'e wear it again at the party?

SIBLEY. Of course. But Petronell's got a new dress. White with a gold band and sweet peas in her hat. She'll be a lovely sight.

RICHARD. No doubt she will. Parson Tudor is to be there and Doctor Rundle. And my old man's going. He haven't been to a party for untold years.

I don't want him to come, because his company manners belong to the past. But come he will.

SIBLEY. He's a dear old chap. I love him.

RICHARD. He's all right so long as he keeps his mouth shut. And I'll tell him you love him.

[*Pause.*

SIBLEY. Will you have a bit of cake?

RICHARD. Yes—if you'll cut it.

[SIBLEY *puts cake on his plate. Enter* PETRONELL. *She has made herself very smart.*

PETRONELL. My! Is it you? Whatever brings you, Richard?

RICHARD. These here legs, Petronell.

SIBLEY. I must run down the village for father.

[*Rises and takes her sun-bonnet from a nail.* RICHARD *looks at her.* PETRONELL *shakes hands with* RICHARD.

RICHARD. [*Shakes hands with* PETRONELL *and looks at* SIBLEY.] Good-bye, then. And thank you for your company, I'm sure.

SIBLEY. And welcome, Richard. [*Exit* SIBLEY.

PETRONELL. Don't let me spoil your tea.

RICHARD. I've done. I must be going myself. Have you heard about George Smerdon?

PETRONELL. No; what about him?

RICHARD. All his Uncle Peter's money. And George is a man used to think in sixpences. 'Twill make his brain reel. Why, he couldn't picture a hundred pound—let alone five thousand.

PETRONELL. Five thousand! Fancy. 'Tis a pity a clever man like you didn't have it.

RICHARD. I shall have plenty some day.

PETRONELL. And you'll rise to spending it, no doubt.

RICHARD. I won't waste and I won't screw. I'll keep in the middle of the road, I will. But a wife's the first thing us thinks about. 'Tis wonderful what a lot of difference even small money makes. Half-a-crown a week on a poor man's wages have meant marriage to thousands. Why, half the coming generation be the result of two-and-six rise, for the fathers!

PETRONELL. You're such a clever chap—you think things out.

RICHARD. So I do, and up here to Applegarth, there's always such a lot of clever people to talk to.

PETRONELL. That's why you come?

RICHARD. Of course. [*Lights his pipe.*] Be your father going to marry again? 'Tis whispered he's looking round. I've seed his hoss tethered outside Widow Windeatt's farm to King's Head more than once.

PETRONELL. Mrs Windeatt—the fox hunter!

RICHARD. And then, again, they say in the village he's always buying penny stamps from the post-mistress.

PETRONELL. That horror, Mary Hearn?

RICHARD. They say she peeps in the letters sometimes. And then there's Miss Thirza Tapper and her villa residence—she's in the running too.

PETRONELL. Good gracious! What will you say next?

RICHARD. 'Twill be one of them, no doubt, or else some other party. Then you girls won't be wanted no more.

PETRONELL. We must stop here—if nobody asks us to go anywhere else.

RICHARD. Come, come—you needn't talk like that. How many have axed you a'ready?

PETRONELL. Not the right one.

RICHARD. Maybe he's nearer than you guess.

PETRONELL. I never think about marriage.

RICHARD. I do.

PETRONELL. Do you, Dick?

RICHARD. Yes, faith. 'Tis a thing you ought to put all your intellects into, when you're about it.

PETRONELL. You believe in it?

RICHARD. I do, then. If a man have got faith and hope, then let him try his luck. If he's faint-hearted and doubtful, let him bide a bachelor.

PETRONELL. Faith and hope first?

RICHARD. And charity afterwards. But, before all, faith in the female. I'd back my fancy with my last copper, and—and—there's a woman will know it some day.

PETRONELL. My stars! You're in love, Dick?

RICHARD. I ban't no more ashamed of it than the colour of my hair. Yes, I'm in—tail over head—swimming for dear life, you might say. But I'm keeping my wits. I ain't going to make a fool of myself. There's a right time and a wrong time.

PETRONELL. A man never knows the right time.

RICHARD. You speak from experience. Of course 'tis always the wrong time if the woman says 'no.' There's a good few very proper men have come afore you with their hearts naked; and, no doubt, to a proud thing like you, 'tis easy to say 'no.'

PETRONELL. I'm not proud—only self-respecting, Richard.

RICHARD. Don't you say 'no' too often, however. A girl gets a bad name for it; and then, afore she knows where she is, 'tis out that she's not for a husband, and she never gets the chance of saying 'yes.'

PETRONELL. I'll not say 'no' to the right one.

RICHARD. I wonder what his name is.

PETRONELL. Perhaps you know it, Richard.

RICHARD. Yes, I reckon I do.

PETRONELL. The men be all after brains nowadays.

RICHARD. Don't you believe it. Most men take a woman—like a girl takes a box of chocolates—for the picture on the lid.

PETRONELL. Do they?

RICHARD. Yes, and then, if they don't like what's inside, they——

PETRONELL. I've got no brains, I know that.

RICHARD. Yes, you have. Sibley says you've got the brains of the family. Now I must be gone.

[*Rises.*

PETRONELL. Poor Sibley! Come in the garden and I'll pick you a rose.

RICHARD. Be you fond of Sibley?

PETRONELL. Of course I am.

RICHARD. [*Nods.*] Have she any husband feeling about her?

PETRONELL. She's a girl.

RICHARD. That's nothing. There's lots about that look to be girls to the eye; but they ain't really. They'll never turn into women—no more than a working bee can turn into a queen.

PETRONELL. Like our Araminta—the toiling, moiling sort.

RICHARD. The neuter bees makes honey, so we can forgive them; but I'm damned if the neuter women do. I don't know what's come to 'em. 'Tis the Secondary Schools, I reckon; but there's thousands of females wife-old nowadays, and they've got no more use for a husband and childer than I have for a pair of wings.

PETRONELL. Poor, unfinished creatures!

RICHARD. They want to earn their own living and stand beholden to no man. They'll treat us like the bees treat the drones afore long.

PETRONELL. The drones are idle, showy creatures.

RICHARD. You can't have a hive without the drones, nor a world without the men; but these here busy, bitter women would bring the end of the world in sight.

PETRONELL. Don't you be frightened: 'twill last our time. Come and choose a rose.

RICHARD. I have chosen a rose for that matter—a rose without a thorn.

PETRONELL. Red, or white, I wonder?

[*Exeunt* PETRONELL *and* RICHARD COAKER. ARAMINTA *peeps in from the other door, then she enters. She begins to clear away the tea things, and then puts them on a tray and looks out of the window and smiles. Enter* SAMUEL SWEETLAND *after her. He goes to the window.*

SWEETLAND. [*Looking from window.*] She's giving him a rose, I see.

ARAMINTA. 'Twill happen, no doubt. Belike it has happened.

SWEETLAND. I must take time by the forelock myself, Minta, else I'll be a lonely man in a minute. There's no harm in being fore-handed—eh ?

ARAMINTA. 'Tis a wise man's place to be.

SWEETLAND. How long have my Tibby been gathered home ?

ARAMINTA. Two years and a month.

SWEETLAND. 'Twas her dying gasp, you may say, that I should take another, though she didn't name no names.

ARAMINTA. Too clever for that, poor dear.

SWEETLAND. But we be up against it now. Set down that tray and help me. There's no more understanding woman than you, when you like. Us will run over the possibles and impossibles, Minta. There's a female or two be floating round my mind, like the smell of Sunday dinner. Of course the first I offer for might say 'no.'

ARAMINTA. [*Leaving the loaded tray and getting a pencil and writing-pad from dresser drawer.*] 'Tis any

odds she won't. Women mostly know they're born, I believe, though men often do not. You'll be married afore the daffodils come.

SWEETLAND. The daffodils. I ban't going to wait for the daffodils, and me up home five and fifty. I'll be married afore the Christmas bills fall in. Are you ready? The widow man often turns to widows, Minta.

ARAMINTA. And seldom in vain, I believe.

SWEETLAND. I haven't got no special feeling against a maiden, however, if she be of seasonable age and not too far gone. Be that as it will, you can begin with a widow. Set down Louisa Windeatt.

ARAMINTA. Ah, I thought so—clever man!

SWEETLAND. Strong, hearty, always cheerful, well preserved. A thought too fond of fox-hunting, perhaps. What's her age?

ARAMINTA. Fifty, I reckon.

SWEETLAND. Her back view's not a day more than thirty.

ARAMINTA. You'll live with her front view, however. She's a lucky woman, I'm sure.

SWEETLAND. She'll do very nice. Then for second string, let's say Nelly Gurney to Dunstan Mill.

ARAMINTA. Don't you do that, Sweetland. She's got a very driving nature and be terrible hard to please.

SWEETLAND. She's always busy.

ARAMINTA. Always too busy. That woman

wouldn't leave anything for Providence to do if she could help it.

SWEETLAND. Providence have always got to be tidying up after some women.

ARAMINTA. Nelly Gurney's a deal board with a conscience and a tongue—to say it kindly.

SWEETLAND. I don't want to marry a deal board—nor yet a tongue. Leave her out, then, and set down Mary Hearn at the Post Office.

ARAMINTA. Not too young for 'e ?

SWEETLAND. She ain't so young as she'd have us think.

ARAMINTA. A very clever woman at figures.

SWEETLAND. And a very fine figure herself. I like they pillowy women—so long as they're pillowy in the proper places.

ARAMINTA. A woman that's a pillow at thirty be often a whole feather bed ten years later. You don't mind her nature ? She's very excitable.

SWEETLAND. Not with me. I'd soon cure that. If I can't manage a woman—— Set her down third. For Number Two I'll have a dash at Thirza Tapper. She was my Tibby's dearest woman friend on earth. And a lady born too.

ARAMINTA. [*Doubtfully.*] You don't think she's too far into the spinster state ? There's old maid writ on every curl of her to my eyes.

SWEETLAND. She's well to do, and knows what's due to herself, and so nice in her ways as a bantam hen.

ARAMINTA. Her villa residence be her god, you

know. Some, like her, let their hearts go out to cats and dogs, or a parrot; but she's got her villa. I can't see her torn out of her villa.

SWEETLAND. Surely she wouldn't set her little house higher than Applegarth Farm? She wouldn't put bricks and mortar above a fine man's living clay?

ARAMINTA. She might—especially since she built on the bathroom. It's woke a lot of spiritual pride in her that bathroom—to say it kindly.

SWEETLAND. Put her second, however.

ARAMINTA. That's Louisa Windeatt, Thirza Tapper and Mary Hearn.

SWEETLAND. Just one more for luck.

ARAMINTA. My dear man, you'll never get to the fourth.

SWEETLAND. No doubt, I shan't—all the same, you write down Mercy Bassett——

ARAMINTA. Mercy Bassett? Who's she?

SWEETLAND. Her that lives with her married daughter at Dawlish, and keeps "The Ring o' Bells" public-house.

ARAMINTA. [*Writing.*] I don't know her.

SWEETLAND. A publican's widow, and thinks the world of me. [*Takes paper.*] So there 'tis. 'Tis almost indecent to see 'em all on one bit of paper, like they foreign heathen, that keeps as many wives as we have eggs for breakfast.

ARAMINTA. But you don't want 'em all.

SWEETLAND. No, no—only one. [*Puts paper in pocket.*] And if my dear, dead Tibby was here,

she'd be the first to urge me on — wouldn't she ?

ARAMINTA. Not if she was here, Sweetland ; not if she was here ; but where she is—no doubt.

SWEETLAND. Yes—none will be more interested to see how I fare than my Tibby. Well, we can only trust the Lord to do the right thing ; we can't make Him. D'you know, Minta, I've a very good mind to go for Louisa Windeatt to-night ! Might just ride up over to King's Head and take her by storm—eh ? She likes a plucky man.

ARAMINTA. Shall I put out them mustard-coloured clothes, or the blacks ?

SWEETLAND. That's a nice question. Perhaps the blacks, and they new yellow leggings and——

ARAMINTA. [*Looking out of window.*] Good powers ! Here *is* Widow Windeatt !

SWEETLAND. By Jupiter ! There now—what d'you think of that ! She's getting off her hoss !

ARAMINTA. She's come about Polly Reep's character, I reckon.

SWEETLAND. Like a lamb to the slaughter ! What shall I do ? Tell me what I shall do, can't 'e ?

ARAMINTA. Go at her this very minute ! You'm just in the temper for it.

SWEETLAND. [*Excited.*] So I will, then. Keep they gals out of the way, and get out of the way yourself.

ARAMINTA. All right. There's lots of time. She's beckoned Ash to hold her hoss. I'll get you

another coat and your blue tie. Blue's your colour.

[*Takes off his coat and tie and departs quickly.*

SWEETLAND. [*Calling after her.*] And fetch a hairbrush, will 'e? [*He moves restlessly about; drinks some milk from the milk jug, then lifts the tray off the table and bundles up the cloth and puts it into a drawer. At open door.*] Be quick, woman. She's coming.

Enter ARAMINTA, *panting. She carries a black coat, a blue tie and a hairbrush.*

ARAMINTA. Be your hands clean?

SWEETLAND. They'll do.

[*She gets him into his coat, puts on his tie, and touches up his hair and whiskers.*

ARAMINTA. That's all right. [*A knock at the door.*] *Going to mantelshelf and taking a little silver box from it.*] And here's your throat lozenges—you'll want 'em.

SWEETLAND. [*Going to door.*] Clear out—clear out quick! Don't mess about!

ARAMINTA. Keep calm afore all things, and let her feel you're master.

[*She picks up tray and goes off as* SWEETLAND *opens the door.*

SWEETLAND. Why, here's a brave sight! Walk in, ma'am, walk in.

Enter LOUISA WINDEATT *in short riding-habit. She wears a hard hat and carries a riding-stock.*

Your visits be like the angels'—few and far between.

LOUISA. And no less welcome, I hope?

SWEETLAND. Welcome as the spring rain. 'Tis a very curious freak of nature, you may say, but I was actually coming up to see you this evening.

LOUISA. Were you? What a pity I didn't know it. My! 'Tis hot. A thunderstorm's brewing.

SWEETLAND. And nearer than you think for perhaps. Sit down. You look a bit dewy. Will 'e drink?

LOUISA. No—no—no drinks between meals. I'm putting on flesh too fast as 'tis. Thank goodness cub-hunting's in sight.

SWEETLAND. And a few brave litters round about, I hear. Now what's your business? Then I'll tell you mine.

LOUISA. I want your dairymaid's character—Polly Reep.

SWEETLAND. She's all right. Minta Dench thinks a lot of her. There's nothing against her, but she will change her place every year—feather-brained fool.

LOUISA. That's not a fault. Servants ought to change every year, in my opinion. 'Tis good for them and their masters and mistresses too.

SWEETLAND. I'll grant 'tis generally good for us. You can't often change for the worse.

LOUISA. There's some mistresses think their

places are the best on earth, and fancy the end of the world's coming if a girl gives notice.

SWEETLAND. Right—as usual. And now you hear me. I was coming up over like the foxes you're so fond of—to pick up a fat hen after dark! Ha-ha!

LOUISA. We lock up pretty clever. You'd never have got in.

SWEETLAND. Bolts and bars be vain against a man like me. I'm a tiger when I'm properly roused. 'Devil take the hindmost' is my motto.

LOUISA. What a man of mystery, to be sure.

SWEETLAND. I do puzzle the people a bit! I'm that nice in my speech and use fine words.

LOUISA. No—'tis your funny voice, I believe.

SWEETLAND. [*Starting.*] My 'funny voice'! You wouldn't hurt my feelings, Louisa?

LOUISA. Hurt your feelings, Sweetland? Not likely. Why should I?

SWEETLAND. I don't want my voice to sound funny on your ear—far from it.

LOUISA. [*Frankly.*] I'm sorry. I'd sooner pleasure you than most men, and I think you know it.

SWEETLAND. Then don't you interrupt. We lovers are kittle-cattle and must have a loose rein, or there's trouble. I'm like a raging torrent you may say; and yet there's that in me that won't take 'yes' for granted. 'Tis a native modesty, Louisa.

LOUISA. Marrying again? We all knew you would. I am glad. I wish you joy of her, whoever she is. But what's that got to do with breaking into King's Head?

SWEETLAND. Good Lord, Louisa, you're very near as humble and backward as I am myself.

LOUISA. The fat hen you want—was it for the wedding breakfast?

SWEETLAND. No—for supper. I was talking in parables, my dear. I wasn't only coming to tell you I'm in love. I was going to name the party. And there was every reason why the secret should come to you afore any other body—because—keep seated—I've cast my eyes round Little Silver and brought 'em to rest at King's Head. I've chosen you to sit at my right hand, Louisa. I don't say it in no rash and proud spirit; and I don't put out my hand and pluck you, like a berry off a bush; but I know that you and me be both out of the common and above the everyday sort. So naturally we seek each other out, because like clings to like. I'm a man that a little child can lead, but a regiment of soldiers couldn't drive. You're properly fortunate, and so am I—so am I. Just a bit of fair give and take you may call it, and if the advantage lies a thought with you—why, that's as it should be. 'Tis the joy of the strong to give. We've both been married before and both drew a prize. But there's no call to rake up the dust of the dead.

LOUISA. No, don't do that.

SWEETLAND. You bide quiet till I've finished; then you can have your say. There's a good bit of poetry hid in me, and you bring it out something wonderful. Only three nights agone I said to my Petronell, as I looked across the valley—I said,

"There's Widow Windeatt's light aglimmering up there to King's Head, and here's our lights glimmering down here to Applegarth. Be blessed if us ain't twinkling out for each other," I said, "like a couple of glow-worms in a hedge." Pretty good poetry—eh?

LOUISA. You haven't talked it over with the girls?

SWEETLAND. Certainly not. I'm a secret man. I don't bleat my affairs. You're the first to know your luck, my dear; and now let me hear mine. Out with it. 'Yes' be a very short word.

[*Takes her hand.*

LOUISA. But there's a shorter. [*Disengaging her hand.*] I'm real proud to have pleased you; but I couldn't do it.

SWEETLAND. Couldn't do what?

LOUISA. I couldn't marry you, Sweetland. 'Tis a great honour you offer; but I'm not the sort of woman for you—I'm not indeed—too independent—too fond of my own way.

SWEETLAND. Don't let that trouble you. You'll only feel the velvet glove. You'd come to it gradual and never know I was breaking you in. I quite understand your character. I shouldn't interfere with none of your fun—I should add to it. Don't be too fussy; don't let your selfishness spoil your happiness and mine. My late wife—my Tibby——

LOUISA. Dear soul! I'm not like her. I feel terrible sure you wouldn't be able to break me in. If Jonathan Windeatt couldn't—how should a gentle creature like you?

SWEETLAND. 'Gentle'! I'm not gentle. Don't you think I'm one of they poor zanies that go through life praying the people not to hurt them. I come before you in all the dignity of widowhood. I come to you for a spouse, not for advice. 'Tis for me to know what sort of woman I want, not you. I'm not here to ask you to find me a wife, Louisa; I'm here because I've found one. And don't you fool yourself to think I can't break you in, for you'd mighty soon find 'twas well within my power. This ain't the work of a moment, and you know it. Why have I climbed up your hill forty times since my wife died? Not for my health, I assure you. I've been looking round on the quiet this many a month—and I always got back to King's Head. So there 'tis—all cut and dried for this past twelve months—so far as I'm concerned.

LOUISA. It can't be, however. Nothing in the world's so impossible.

SWEETLAND. Do you mean that; or are you only playing about?

LOUISA. I do mean it, and I'm not playing about. 'Tis much too solemn a subject to play about. I respect you and know you're a good sort, though maybe you take yourself a thought too seriously. But marriage—no. I never felt nothing like that. Some might suit me; but not you.

[SWEETLAND *stands up and regards her with bitterness and astonishment. He takes a lozenge out of his silver box, snaps the lid, and puts the box on the mantelpiece.*

LOUISA. Good-bye, and thank you for the great compliment you've paid me.

SWEETLAND. If I say 'good-bye,' I mean 'good-bye.' Mind that! Don't think I shall come up your darned hill again as long as I live, Widow Windeatt, because I shall not.

LOUISA. I hope you won't take it in that spirit, I'm sure.

SWEETLAND. Oh yes, I shall. I've got my pride.

LOUISA. So I see.

SWEETLAND. And I'll say one word: you haven't treated me in a very ladylike spirit over this job. You ain't nice-minded—no, you ain't, Louisa. However, I don't want to judge you! I've got something better to do.

LOUISA. At least we can part friends.

SWEETLAND. Friendship! What do you know about friendship? 'Tis Farmer Dunnybrig, no doubt, that have dazzled you; but mark my words——

LOUISA. You needn't drag him in.

SWEETLAND. You'll soon wish your cake was dough again if you take that man. I know him and you don't. His place is mortgaged to the hilt. And one more thing: never you let this day's work go no farther. I order that—I command that. There's a right and a wrong way in these things, and if you whisper a word—'twould be the last straw on the camel's back—so I warn you. Not to man, woman or child.

LOUISA. Be quite sure I shan't—not a syllable to a soul.

SWEETLAND. Then I'll wish you 'good-bye'; and I'll wish you more sense at the same time.

LOUISA. I'll try and be wiser.

SWEETLAND. And don't you write to me and say you've changed your mind, nor nothing like that, Louisa Windeatt; 'twould be all in vain now. I won't hear it, I don't want 'e now.

LOUISA. I promise faithfully I won't change my mind. I quite understand that this is final.

SWEETLAND. You've brought your doom on yourself—always remember that.

LOUISA. I know I have. And—Polly Reep's all right?

SWEETLAND. Be damned to Polly Reep!

[*Exit* LOUISA WINDEATT. SAMUEL SWEETLAND *stands staring before him. Then he takes* ARAMINTA'S *paper with the women's names on it out of his pocket and reads it.* ARAMINTA DENCH *peeps in. Then she enters, bringing his working coat with her.*

ARAMINTA. Will 'e change again?

[SWEETLAND *tears off coat and flings it on the floor, and the tie with it.* ARAMINTA *sees that he is agitated and does not speak. She helps him into his old coat and takes away the black coat and blue tie. As she goes off,* PETRONELL *and* SIBLEY *enter by the other door.*

PETRONELL. What did Widow Windeatt want, father?

SIBLEY. Was it Polly Reep's character?

Enter ASH.

SWEETLAND. Damn Polly Reep, I say—I be sick of Polly Reep. [THEY *show astonishment.*

ASH. Where's Minta to?

Enter ARAMINTA DENCH.

More cider—more cider. We be all choked with thirst.

[ARAMINTA *gets a large meat dish from the dresser.*

ARAMINTA. I'll be there in a minute.

SWEETLAND. [*Bursting out.*] Don't you have nothing to do with that Louisa Windeatt no more, you girls. She's a vulgar, low-bred, coarse creature and always running after the men. No better than she should be—a fox-hunting old baggage! [ALL *express great astonishment.*

PETRONELL. Father!

[ARAMINTA, *who is more amazed than anybody, lets the heavy dish fall and break.*

SWEETLAND. [*Glad of any excuse for the outlet of his anger.*] What have you done now, you cat-handed fool? 'Tis the end of the world seemingly! Let it come! Who cares? Get out of my way,

Churdles Ash—always messing about indoors instead of at your work!

[SWEETLAND *thrusts* ASH *aside, and storms off.* ASH *drops on a chair behind him.* PETRONELL *stares after her father.* SIBLEY *and* ARAMINTA *pick up the fragments of the big dish.*

ASH. The end of the world, sure enough!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*Miss Tapper's villa residence. A dining-room opening by French windows into the garden. The room is cleared for the party, and the chairs and the sofa are placed against the walls. On the right wall there hangs a portrait of Captain Tapper in uniform; on the left wall on a bracket stands the model of his ship. Down the left side of the room runs a narrow table. It is covered with a white cloth, on which is spread an elaborate tea, with crockery, flowers, dishes and cakes. The French windows are open and reveal a good space of the garden. There is also an exit to right.*

[MISS THIRZA TAPPER *and* ARAMINTA DENCH *discovered.* MISS TAPPER *is dressed in black silk, with many trinkets displayed about her person.* ARAMINTA *wears black, with a white apron.*

MISS T. The Lowestoft china set is safe with you, Miss Dench. And do keep your eye on Susan, as far as you can. She is already much excited. You've made the table most striking.

ARAMINTA. A proper masterpiece. 'Twill be a great triumph. And Mr Sweetland's coming up in a minute with a brave dish of our best red plums.

MISS T. Kind creature! I wish there were more like him.

ARAMINTA. You may well say that. All heart, that man. A proper lesson. I never see nobody good enough to black his boots.

MISS T. Yes; and the glee-singers must have their tea before they go; but not before they sing.

Enter CHURDLES ASH, *in the green livery and brass buttons. The coat, which is far too large, is worn over a pair of black trousers.*

ASH. 'Tis too big yet.

MISS T. Lace up your boots, Mr Ash.

ASH. [*Sitting down.*] All right! all right! Plenty of time.

MISS T. [*Looking at watch.*] True; but some who drive may come early. Is the front gate open?

ASH. Not yet. You don't want all the pigs and geese from the common in your garden, do 'e?

Enter SUSAN MAINE, MISS TAPPER'S *maid-of-all-work. She is dressed in black, with an apron and cap. She is excited.*

SUSAN. Please, Miss, they pink things be all running about as if they was alive.

MISS T. The ices melting! Tchut! Where have you put them?

[MISS TAPPER *hastens off, with* SUSAN *behind her.*

ASH. People didn't ought to give parties if they can't keep their hair on about it. She's like a hen

wanting to lay her first egg and can't find no place good enough.

ARAMINTA. She's all right. 'Tis a flustering thing on such a grand scale.

ASH. Wicked waste, I call it. This sort of wanton feeding be setting labour against capital. Waste—waste everywhere; and if a table like this could be seen by the men in that monkey-house they call Parliament, no doubt something would be done. But our turn will come. They laugh loudest that laugh last; and the workers will laugh last.

ARAMINTA. 'Tis treason you talk.

ASH. The treason of to-day be the reason of to-morrow.

Enter SUSAN MAINE, *crying*.

ARAMINTA. What's the matter, Susie?

SUSAN. She'll be the death of me. I didn't know they ices would melt if you looked at 'em.

ASH. Ices! There won't be no ices where the rich are going.

ARAMINTA. Cheer up and wipe your eyes and do your best.

SUSAN. She's been going from bad to worse for a month. Fuss and fret and biting her nails, till you'd think she was going to be hung, instead of giving a party to her friends. And I'm only flesh and blood myself. She's got on my nerves so that I screeched this morning, just because a strange cat looked in the window.

ASH. Give notice—now, this instant moment; that'll shake her up.

SUSAN. She ought to have more sense at her time of life.

ASH. Sense ain't got nothing to do with age, else the world wouldn't be so full of old fools.

[MR SAMUEL SWEETLAND *appears in the garden. He carries a basket.*

ARAMINTA. You tell Miss Tapper Mr Sweetland's here, Susan. He wants to see her particular.

[*Exit* SUSAN MAINE.

ASH. What's he come for? [*Going.*] There's time for half a pipe and half a pint yet.

Enter SAMUEL SWEETLAND.

ARAMINTA. Don't you drink till after. You'll need all your wits to name the people.

[*Exit* ASH.

SWEETLAND. [*He is in holiday attire, with blue tie, grey suit and hard hat.*] Where is she? Take these here Victorias, Minta, and see you set 'em in the middle of the feast.

ARAMINTA. [*Tidying him and taking off his hat.*] Is this a clever time to come, d'you reckon? She's got the party on her mind a good bit just now.

SWEETLAND. So much the better. I'll take her unawares. You can often rush 'em into a thing. Let me go to the looking-glass. Be I all right behind?

ARAMINTA. Don't you feel too hopeful, however.

SWEETLAND. No, no!—not after my last dose. I'm here in a very determined spirit, of course; but I'm going to be patient. She's worth a bit of trouble.

ARAMINTA. A good wife's a sword in her husband's hand, they say.

SWEETLAND. And a bad one's a thorn in it. What we generally get be a wife neither bad nor good—just a human woman with her faults and virtues so mixed, that we never know which it is to be—from the time she gets out of her bed to the time she goes back to it.

ARAMINTA. 'Tis up and down with the best of us. Woman's a mystery in every walk of life, I believe.

SWEETLAND. She is. As maid, wife and widow—a mystery always. And owing to their fatal habit of talking too much—and thinking too little——

ARAMINTA. Some be silent enough.

SWEETLAND. Some certainly have a great gift of silence. And they're most dangerous of all, for they work behind their silence, like a mole underground. In fact, there's three things you want afore you come to women, Minta; and the first is sleepless caution; and the second is sleepless caution; and the third is sleepless caution.

Enter MISS TAPPER.

Look here at my 'Victorias.' I've picked the cream of the tree for you.

MISS T. You kind, generous man! How beautiful! What wonderful plums! A thousand thanks! They will add quite a touch of colour.

SWEETLAND. You put 'em bang in the middle instead of that vawse of flowers.

MISS T. We must see—we must see. Arrange them in a Lowestoft dish, Miss Dench.

SWEETLAND. And don't hurry back, Minta.

[*Exit* ARAMINTA *with the basket of plums.*

MISS T. You always keep your word. It was good of you. But you mustn't stop now. There are a hundred little finishing touches.

SWEETLAND. Don't you do no more. 'Tis all as perfect as a refreshment room in a railway station. No idea you'd got such cut glass. And now just you list to me for ten minutes, please, and forget all about your blessed party. There's far more important business in the air than your party, Miss Tapper.

MISS T. Not for me, my dear friend.

SWEETLAND. Yes there is—for you. Don't think you're one of the forgotten ones—far from it. There's love in the air, Thirza.

MISS T. [*Puts a touch to table.*] Whatever are you talking about?

SWEETLAND. 'Tis the season of fruits and corn and ripeness, ain't it? Quite as proper a time for love as the Spring.

MISS T. Dear me! Hark! Do I hear a galloping horse? Mrs Windeatt will be sure to ride.

SWEETLAND. Is old Windeatt coming?

MISS T. She accepted.

SWEETLAND. A frivolous fool! I hate to see a middle-aged woman capering after hounds. 'Tis so undignified.

MISS T. No doubt a time comes when we ought to put away childish things.

SWEETLAND. A woman like you—always full of good works—do properly shine, compared to that feather-headed fox-hunter.

MISS T. Why compare us? Louisa has a good heart, and is full of the milk of human kindness.

SWEETLAND. Don't you believe it. I know her better than what you do. She dyes her hair, anyway.

MISS T. Surely not! surely not!

[*Looks at her watch, while he walks about.*

SWEETLAND. Yes—and starves her waist of room for vanity!

MISS T. To think that you observe such things!

SWEETLAND. My wife knew her inside out. My Tibby put you above 'em all—high above 'em. 'The others are all right, but Thirza's a lady.' That's what she used to say.

[MISS TAPPER *is arranging a vase of flowers on the table.*

She set you as high as that.

MISS T. I loved dear Tibby!

SWEETLAND. Well, don't fidget about, then. Take a seat and listen to me.

MISS T. I am listening.

SWEETLAND. Yes—for your baggering party to come. There's heaps of time. You said half after four in the invite. Now you and me have been pretty good friends for twenty year, and my thoughts have been turned a lot to you of late. And if the word may be used without offence on this virgin soil, I

love you. We're old-fashioned people—you and me—but none the worse for that, and——

[Miss Tapper *starts, and is torn in half between* Samuel Sweetland *and the window. She is trying to listen to two things at once, and reveals surprise, nervousness and distraction.*

And—and—damn it, Thirza Tapper, d'you know what's happening? Sit down and behave. I'm asking you to marry me.

Miss T. [*Sitting abruptly down on the sofa, half frightened.*] Dear—dear Mr Sweetland! This is—and at such a moment! I'm quite unstrung—my nerves——

Sweetland. [*Taking a lozenge from his box.*] Be calm, and don't try to do two things at once. I want to marry you, and that's all about it. I love you, and I'm ready and willing to show it. I ain't out of sight of fifty yet, and if you wore your hair different and had they curls on your forehead instead of over your ears, you'd pass for forty-five in good daylight. In fact, you've grown old before your time. But I want you—badly I want you—and why the mischief not? I'm a man a little child can lead, though a regiment of soldiers couldn't drive. I'd be very proud of you, Thirza, because I admire your character something enormous, and I'd leave no stone unturned to be a good husband. As happy as a pair of middle-aged skylarks we should be.

[*He sits beside her on the sofa, and is about to embrace her.*

MISS T. [*Rises as* SAMUEL SWEETLAND *sits. She puts her hand over her eyes and palpitates. Then she lifts her hand over the man's head.*] Rise, dear Samuel Sweetland!

SWEETLAND. That's done, then! And well done. Give me a kiss.

[*Rises with the help of the arm of the sofa and offers to caress* MISS TAPPER.

MISS T. [*Putting up her hands to ward him off.*] I beg you—I beg you! It is a great honour to be singled out—the greatest honour of my life. You are the first who has accepted my sex challenge, dear Samuel Sweetland, and this is a proud moment in consequence. I wish that my dear father could have lived to see it, for he used to say, in his merry nautical way, that men didn't like the cut of my jib. But you have banished that reproach, and I hope he knows it. I too am wanted by a man—and such a man! A terrific experience—never to be forgotten.

SWEETLAND. Well, don't talk so much—come into my arms.

MISS T. No—I shall never seek the shelter of a man's arms—not even yours, dear Mr Sweetland. I have long ago decided not to marry; though had I considered such a thing, I could have wished for no kinder husband or handsomer man.

SWEETLAND [*Thrusting his hands in his breeches pockets and staring at her.*] Good God A'mighty—d'you mean 'no'?

MISS T. You mustn't speak in that tone of voice. I never encouraged you.

SWEETLAND. What's coming over women ? They'll be at famine prices presently. You'll be sorry for this, when you're damned party's over and you've got time to see what you've done.

MISS T. I shall be sorry to have caused a good man pain. I shall always feel my heart grow warm when I remember this sacred hour.

SWEETLAND. Then why the dickens don't you take me ? I care for you a very great deal—I do, indeed. You'd have it all your own way.

MISS T. It couldn't be. I say nothing about marriage; but I have my work before me—a thousand things—the Mothers' League—and the Prevention of Cruelty to Children—and the South African Drug Fund—and—and my villa residence, and so on.

SWEETLAND. I daresay we could stick up a bath-room at my place, if that's all.

MISS T. That isn't all. None of these things would stand between us, if I were a marrying woman. But I am not—though I shall be proud to my dying day that you thought I was. [*Puts out her hand.*

SWEETLAND. Churdles Ash be right. You're all a pack of hen-devils under your skins. You'll be as vain as a jackdaw now; but little you care for my feelings. And mind this—though no doubt you'll want to and shout it out from top of church tower—I'll beg you'll do no such thing. I've paid you a great honour, and 'twould be a cowardly act to whisper it to a soul.

MISS T. Don't spoil your beautiful proposal.

Don't be unkind to me. I have good blood in my veins. You have offered your hand in marriage to the daughter of Captain Lindley Morris Tapper of the Merchant Marine. I shall mention this great experience—on my knees, and only on my knees. I shall never cease to pray for your future welfare and happiness.

SWEETLAND. Do nothing of the kind. I won't be messed about in your prayers. Forget what I've said. [*Looks round for his hat.*

MISS T. I shall never, never forget it.

SWEETLAND. [*Subdued.*] Well, I suppose I'd better creep off—with my tail between my legs, as usual. I shan't come to your party now.

MISS T. I beg you to come. Everything will be clouded and my pleasure quite spoiled if you keep away.

SWEETLAND. You don't care—you're only pretending.

[*Takes paper out of his pocket, consults it and goes slowly off through French windows.* MISS TAPPER *sits down again, takes off her glasses and stares in front of her. She is a good deal moved. She brings out a pocket handkerchief, wipes her eyes and blows her nose.*

Enter ARAMINTA DENCH *with the red plums on a dish.*

ARAMINTA. [*Sadly.*] I see he's gone off with his head down.

MISS T. What a man! What a tower of strength! What a rare spirit, Miss Dench!

ARAMINTA. You want to live with him to see the beautiful truth of him. As kind and as Christian—why, a child could——

MISS T. So he said! so he said! And I wanted all my nerve for my little affair. Excuse me, I must get my smelling-salts. I—one never has one's smelling-salts when——

ARAMINTA. Can I get them for you?

[*Exit* MISS TAPPER, *shaking her head and rather unsteady.* ARAMINTA *displays wonder and regret. She puts the plums on the table.*

Enter SUSAN MAINE.

SUSAN. Will you pour the coffee, Miss Dench, please? I don't understand the coffee-pot.

ARAMINTA. Yes. I'll do it. I'll do all the pouring. You can carry round the cups.

Enter MISS TAPPER *from one door and* CHURDLES ASH *from the other.*

ASH. The party have begun. Here's the Smerdon wagonette.

MISS T. How many are in it, Churdles Ash?

[*Sniffing salts.*

ASH. Five all told.

MISS T. I said *four* so particularly!

ASH. Old Ben's driving 'em. He ain't coming to the party, is he ?

[*He goes to the left-hand door and throws it open.* ARAMINTA *and* SUSAN *go behind table.*

ARAMINTA. Shall we light up the spirit lamps, Miss Tapper ?

MISS T. Not yet. They are nearly ten minutes too soon. I wish people——

ASH. [*Now stationed at the door.*] Mrs Smerdon, Mr George Smerdon, Miss Sophie Smerdon and Master Teddy Smerdon.

Enter the SMERDONS—*a mother and her three children.* MISS SOPHIE *is twelve,* MASTER TEDDY *ten.* GEORGE SMERDON *stops to shake hands with* CHURDLES ASH, *while the others pass on.*

ASH. No, No! You mustn't shake hands with me to-day, George. I'm not the party—more's Araminta.

MISS T. [*To* MRS SMERDON.] The first to arrive ! So glad to see you. Sophie dear ! And Teddy—what a man he's growing !

MRS S. You've heard tell about George ?

MISS T. [*Shaking hands with* GEORGE SMERDON.] I have, indeed !

GEORGE. They be at me to share with brother Tom ; but I don't know——

[SOPHIE *and* TEDDY *look at the table and grin at* ARAMINTA *and* SUSAN. TEDDY *points out the cakes to* SOPHIE.

MRS S. What do you think, Miss Tapper? Did George ought to share with his elder brother?

MISS T. Certainly not. George's uncle chose him because he liked him best. We must respect the wishes of the dead.

MRS S. George is as good as gold; but my Tom has more dash in him. Always after a petticoat, that boy. Nature will shout, Miss Tapper; but, as I've told Tom scores of times, 'tis no good listening to nature on eighteen shilling a week.

GEORGE. [*To* ARAMINTA.] Be the Sweetlands coming, Miss Dench?

ARAMINTA. [*Nods.*] They ordained to come.

ASH. [*At door.*] Mr Valiant Dunnybrig.

Enter VALIANT DUNNYBRIG, *a genial man with flowing beard.*

DUNNYBRIG. Not too soon, I hope? How do—how do all? A very fine day for your party, thank God! I wish I'd had some like it for saving my corn. [*Shakes hands with* MISS TAPPER.] My stars, what a brave sight! [*He indicates the table.*

MISS T. How do you do, Mr Dunnybrig?

DUNNYBRIG. Mrs Smerdon too! [*Shakes hands.*] And George, I see! What won't money do? But 'twill take you far higher than this, George, if you only handle it clever.

GEORGE. [*Shaking hands.*] Did I ought to share it with my brother Tom?

DUNNYBRIG. Not a chance!—idle rogue!

MRS S. Don't you say that, Valiant Dunnybrig. The boys will sow their wild oats.

DUNNYBRIG. Then let 'em reap their wild oats; George didn't sow no wild oats; no more did I; no more did your husband.

MRS S. 'Tis all character. There's no virtue in not sowing wild oats, if you ain't got none to sow.

[GEORGE *and* SOPHIE *look at pictures of ships on the walls, and* MISS TAPPER *points to them and explains.* TEDDY *stands glued to the table.*

DUNNYBRIG. [*To* MISS TAPPER.] Do you expect Louisa Windeatt of King's Head?

MISS T. I do—she promised to come.

DUNNYBRIG. That's right! She'll put life into it. She's worth her corn at a feast or a funeral, that woman. Don't you fear 'twill lag after she comes. [*To* ARAMINTA.] How be you, Miss Dench? Ain't you in the party? I'll warrant there's many not half so good as you coming.

ASH. Dr Rundle and Mrs Rundle.

MRS S. That's lucky! I want him.

Enter DOCTOR RUNDLE *and* MRS RUNDLE.

MISS T. Welcome, Doctor! Welcome, dear Mrs Rundle! So good of you both to come.

DR RUNDLE. So good of you to ask us. Ah, Smerdon—we've all got to congratulate you, I hear. How do, Mrs Smerdon?

Mrs S. I'm all right, Doctor; but I wish you'd cast your eye on Teddy. Come here, Teddy boy. He broke out spotty-faced yesterday, and they be all over his chest too.

[*She drags* Teddy *away from the table.*

Dr Rundle. Good Lord! the child's got chicken-pox!

Mrs S. There! If I wasn't right! I said he had two days ago, didn't I, Sophie?

Dr Rundle. He'd better go home at once.

Miss T. Yes, please. I'm so sorry, but——

Mrs S. You be off home, Teddy, and don't mess about.

Teddy. [*Looking at table.*] Mother!

Miss T. Give him a wholesome cake, Miss Dench; then he can run off through the garden.

[Araminta *gives* Teddy *several cakes and a plum.*

Mrs S. You go straight back, mind, and tell Nelly to give 'e a hot bath and put 'e to bed.

[*Teddy goes out through the garden.*

Miss T. [*To* Araminta.] Light up now, please.

Dr Rundle. [*To* Dunnybrig.] You've got your corn in, I see.

Dunnybrig. Such as it is—a crop so thin as an old man's hair. Be you ready for that load of hay, Doctor?

Dr Rundle. Any time—any time!

Ash. Mr Henry Coaker and his nephy, Mr Richard Coaker.

Enter HENRY COAKER—*a very old man*—*and* RICHARD COAKER.

MR COAKER. We be come to the feast, ma'am.

MISS T. And very welcome—very welcome, indeed, Mr Coaker. And you too, Mr Richard.

MR COAKER. There's no parties now like the old ones; but I'm sure you've done your bestest. Nothing have been spared, that's sartain. Ah! and Valiant be invited, I see. How's yourself, Valiant?

DUNNYBRIG. Very clever, my old dear. And you'm pretty peart seemingly.

MR COAKER. I be getting terrible old. I can't let down my food like I did. But I be going to have a dash this afternoon.

DUNNYBRIG. Don't you eat they rubbishy things. They'll turn on 'e afterwards.

MR COAKER. When an old man like me tries for a bit of fun, 'tis like a dog stealing a bone with his eye on the whip. Nature's a regular female, Valiant. She tempts us on, and then, when we do what she wants, she gives us hell!

DUNNYBRIG. 'Tis true. She will have her price.

MR COAKER. I shall soon be done with the joys of the flesh now.

DUNNYBRIG. I shan't. I shall never have done with the flesh—while there's any left on my bones, Henry. Ha—ha!

MR COAKER. You be a boy still.

RICHARD. [*To* GEORGE, *who sits on a chair apart.*]

Well, George, you don't look as if your money weighed any lighter.

GEORGE. Did I ought to share it with brother Tom, Richard?

RICHARD. Share it with Tom! You might so soon share it with all the girls in Plymouth right away. Are the Sweetlands coming?

GEORGE. They are.

RICHARD. I passed Mary Hearn down the road. A flower show's a fool to her.

[*There is constant movement during the scene, and the people walk about in groups, then part and form new groups.*

MISS T. May I ask some of you to sit down? It will make more room for the coming guests. Talk to me for a little while, Mr Coaker. I'm sure you want a chair.

MR COAKER. I do, my dear. I be gone so weak in the hams nowadays that——

[MISS TAPPER *starts and leaves him.*

DR RUNDLE. [*Giving* HENRY COAKER *a chair.*] Hush, Uncle! You've frightened Miss Tapper away. You mustn't use that language at an old maid's tea-party.

MR COAKER. Language, Doctor! Me! I'm a very sweet-mouthed old man—ain't I, Valiant?

DUNNYBRIG. Never been known to use a crooked word since your wife died, Henry.

MR COAKER. Now, Thirza Tapper's father—the old sea captain—'twas enough to blast the crops in the field to hear him when he was worrited. When do us draw up to the table, souls?

Dr Rundle. We don't draw up. They bring the tea round.

Mr Coaker. 'Don't draw up!' What a funny party!

Ash. Mrs Windeatt, from King's Head.

Dunnybrig. At last! [*Hastens to the door.*

[*Little* Sophie Smerdon, *a great favourite of* Henry Coaker, *sits on his lap,*]

Enter Louisa Windeatt.

Here you be—neat as ninepence! Now the sun will shine!

[*Shakes hands for a long time, while* Miss Tapper *waits to greet* Mrs Windeatt.

Louisa. Do let go, Mr Dunnybrig; here's Miss Tapper.

Miss T. Welcome, dear Louisa—always welcome.

Dunnybrig. That's right—a proper good fairy wherever she goes. Shall I fetch her a cup of the best?

Miss T. They'll bring round the tea and coffee in a few minutes.

Dunnybrig. [*To* Mrs Windeatt.] None the worse for that run yester morn?

Louisa. All the better.

Dunnybrig. Did 'e kill?

Louisa. No—we lost him.

Dunnybrig. I seed you go over a stone wall, and my heart went in my mouth.

Louisa. Did you care?

Dunnybrig. You know if I cared!

LOUISA. Find me a chair, we're blocking the gangway.

ASH. [*Hastening to* MISS TAPPER.] Here's a stranger man, and I can't call him out, because I don't know his name!

MISS T. Ask him, then—ask him!

ASH. Aw! [*Hastens back in time to stop* MR GREGSON.] Wait—wait! Don't be so pushing. Your name, please.

GREGSON. Gregson. This is Miss Tapper's party, isn't it?

ASH. Use your eyes. Gregson his name be.

MISS T. Ah! the Glee-singers.

GREGSON. We have arrived, madam.

MISS T. You sing in the garden—where the chairs are arranged under the araucaria. Kindly follow me.

[*Exit* MISS TAPPER *into the garden.* MR GREGSON *goes out after her.*

MRS S. Here, George, and you, Dick Coaker, help the maidens with the cakes and carry 'em round.

GEORGE. [*Who is sitting apart, shakes his head.*] I ban't in trim for revelling.

MRS S. Then you didn't ought to have come.

[RICHARD COAKER, DR RUNDLE *and* MR DUNNYBRIG *pick up dishes of cake and sandwiches.* ARAMINTA *and* SUSAN *carry round cups of tea and coffee.* MR DUNNYBRIG *only waits on* MRS WINDEATT.

MR COAKER. [*To* SUSAN.] Have 'e got a bigger cup, my dear?

SUSAN. No, Mr Coaker. They be all little things like this.

MR COAKER. This ban't a dolls' tea-party, be it? When I'm tea drinking, give me a proper cloam cup to hold a pint.

DUNNYBRIG. [*To* MRS WINDEATT.] Will 'e take a sandwich, or one of these here pink things?

LOUISA. Nothing to eat, thanks.

DUNNYBRIG. Don't you starve yourself for the sake of your riding hosses.

MR COAKER. [*To* RICHARD.] Ban't there no red meat, Dick?

RICHARD. These here are sandwiches.

MR COAKER. What little tiddleys! Put 'em there alongside me.

Enter MISS TAPPER *from the garden.*

MISS T. May I ask those who have had their tea to pass out into the garden?

MR COAKER. We'm only just starting, my dear.

RICHARD. Won't you help yourself, Miss?

MISS T. Presently—presently, Mr Richard. Has Mrs Rundle got some coffee?

ASH. Miss Mary Hearn.

Enter MARY HEARN. *She is very showily dressed, with a grotesque hat full of huge flowers. She is affected and excited, and giggles.*

MISS T. How are you, Mary?

MISS H. Nicely, thank you. Don't I look it?

My! All the world and his wife, I see! How do, Mr Dunnybrig? How d'ye do, Doctor? There was a parcel come for you this morning—physic bottles by the look of it.

MISS T. Tea for Miss Hearn, Susan.

MISS H. No, coffee—if there's any going. They had iced coffee at the vicarage party, I hear—though I wasn't there myself.

MISS T. Here, I'm afraid, we only have it hot.

MISS H. Bless you, that's all right—if 'tis hot. You generally get it lukewarm at a party.

MR COAKER. Coffee wi' ice in it at the vicarage! Good powers! Haven't parson more compassion on the people's bellies?

[SUSAN, *who is giving* MR COAKER *another cup of tea, laughs explosively.*

MISS T. Susan!

MISS H. [*Finds a chair beside* GEORGE SMERDON.] Well, Mr Smerdon, I wish you joy, I'm sure. [RICHARD *brings her cakes.*] Ah, Mr Richard—being useful for once! Old Tapper's going it, eh?

RICHARD. Have a cake, George?

GEORGE. No—I can't eat.

RICHARD. Well—try to look as if you was alive.

GEORGE. All very fine for you; but you don't know what's happening to me.

MISS H. [*Giggling.*] He's in love!

GEORGE. Yes, I be in love; and so's this man; and he's cheerful because, no doubt, 'tis going well with him. But I——

Miss H. There's better fish in the sea than ever came out.

George. I'll dog her—I'll haunt her—I'll give her no peace. I'll not take 'no' for an answer.

Miss H. She's said 'no' then?

George. Never you mind what she's said. You're too clever, you are.

Miss H. But perhaps 'twas before the legacy. You try again.

Richard. And how d'you know I'm in love, George?

George. By the way you keep looking at that door.

Miss H. Are you both after the same, I wonder? We shall have some fun if you are.

Ash. My lot! Mr Sweetland, Miss Petronell Sweetland, Miss Sibley Sweetland. [*To* Sweetland.] Just in time! They're hard at it.

[George *and* Richard *both leave* Miss Hearn *and dash forward on the arrival of the* Sweetlands. Miss Tapper *greets* Mr Sweetland.

Miss T. How good of you all to come!

[*Shakes hands with* Mr Sweetland *and kisses* Petronell *and* Sibley. *They pass on with* George *and* Richard.

Sweetland. [*To* Miss Tapper.] You can kiss *them*, I see!

[Dr Rundle *takes the seat by* Miss Hearn.

Miss H. Look at those ridiculous girls! Which is going to be Mrs George Smerdon, I wonder?

DR RUNDLE. He won't have to ask a girl twice.

MISS H. Her pill will be coated with gold, anyway.

GEORGE. [*Now grown lively, to* PETRONELL.] Will you have tea, or coffee? There's both here.

PETRONELL. Thanks—anything.

GEORGE. Well, don't you move from this spot till I come back. I'll sweep the table for you.

[*He goes to table and collects all that he can carry.*

SIBLEY. Here's a seat, Petronell. Richard's beckoning.

[*They go to the seats and* ARAMINTA *brings them tea.* ARAMINTA *has been walking about with tray and then returning behind the table to pour out more tea and coffee.*

You're tired to death, Minta; do let me help you.

ARAMINTA. Not a bit. 'Tis a splendid party and all going like a marriage bell.

[GEORGE *returns to find* PETRONELL *has moved. Others help themselves from him and take the cup of tea.*

MR COAKER. [*To* SUSAN.] Not another bit, my dear. I be blowed out like a balloon a'ready. 'Tis fantastic food. But what don't fatten, fills. Where's my stick? Be us to have a bit of fun in the garden?

SUSAN. Yes, Mr Coaker. There's four men come all the way from Plymouth.

MR COAKER. [*To* MR DUNNYBRIG.] Be there any

spirits or cordials, to top up with and steady the victuals, Valiant ?

DUNNYBRIG. No, Henry. There's nothing like that. These old maiden ladies be like kittens. They don't think there's any better drink than milk.

MISS T. We might have your song now, Sibley, dear—before we go into the garden.

RICHARD. Hush ! hush ! Miss Sweetland's going to sing.

DUNNYBRIG. Hush, all, for Samuel Sweetland's daughter !

LOUISA. She's got a voice like a robin—so sweet and so happy.

MR COAKER. God send 'tis a funny song ! You want a good laugh after a good guzzle.

SIBLEY. I'll do my best, but I'm very simple at it.

PETRONELL. Sing ' Blue Eyes,' Sibley.

RICHARD. Miss Sweetland's song be called ' Blue Eyes.'

GEORGE. [*To* PETRONELL.] Why for ain't you singing ?

PETRONELL. Miss Tapper didn't ask me.

GEORGE. More fool her.

ASH. The Reverend Tudor.

Enter the REVEREND SEPTIMUS TUDOR.

MISS T. Ah, Vicar ! better late than never. I do hope your dear mother is going to honour me ?

MR TUDOR. Her Bath chair has been wheeled into the garden.

Ash. The Honourable Mrs Tudor be in the verandah.

[*A Bath chair is wheeled in sight of the window.* Miss Tapper *hastens out.* Araminta *follows with tea, and* Dr Rundle *follows* Araminta.

Mr Tudor. Ah, Mr Coaker!

Mr Coaker. Farmer Sweetland's girl be just going to sing a song, your Reverence.

Mr Tudor. Don't let me interrupt.

Enter Miss Tapper.

Miss T. Now, Sibley, dear. Do be seated, Vicar. Tea or coffee for Mr Tudor, please.

[*The* Party *sit and stand. There is a cessation of movement. At the window a Bath chair is seen with a very distinguished and aristocratic white-haired old woman in it, and a footman in livery.* Araminta *comes back.* Sibley *stands in the midst and sings sweetly and simply without any self-consciousness.* Mr Sweetland *talks gloomily to* Araminta, *but not loud enough to be heard.*

Sibley's Song.

"Oh, Daisy, dear, wi' eyes so blue,
Come tell me quick, and come tell me true,
If I be your man, or the chap in grey—
Him as drove 'e to market but yesterday!
Him as drove 'e to market but yesterday!

Why, Billy Blee, now don't 'e frown,
And don't 'e look up, nor don't 'e look down,
But look straight into my eyes so blue—
For 'tis there you can see whether I love you;
For 'tis there you can see whether I love you.

Then Billy stared with all his might,
And fondly thought that he'd seen aright.
But uplong to worship the next Sunday
If her wasn't axed out with the chap in grey;
Yes—he'd put up the banns, thicky chap in grey!"

MR COAKER. Good—good! Ha-ha!—a proper song!

SIBLEY. There's one more verse, Mr Coaker.

MISS T. Hush! hush!

SIBLEY.

"Now Billy's swearing, so 'tis said,
That a man be a fool to trust a maid,
And the devil, though black as a parson's shoe,
Have doubtless got eyes of a butiful blue—
Bill knows that his eyes be a butiful blue!"

[*Applause follows the song.*

DUNNYBRIG. Be the devil so black as your shoes, Vicar?

MR TUDOR. [*Who holds a cup of tea and a biscuit.*] Miss Sweetland should choose something more refined. She sings quite prettily. You haven't forgot our harvest festival, Mr Dunnybrig, or you, Mr Coaker?

DUNNYBRIG. The Lord of the Harvest have smote

the harvest this year. It ain't a time for making any fuss about it, in my opinion. Least said, soonest mended.

MR COAKER. Yes, we must forgive and forget, and hope the Almighty will do as He'd be done by next year.

MR TUDOR. A harvest festival embraces all the fruits of the earth.

MR COAKER. So it do, no doubt. I've got some vegetable marrows fat as little pigs. You can have 'em for the church windows; and us be drawing turnips a'ready—proper masterpieces—so round and white as a woman's bosom.

MR TUDOR. Really! How remarkable!

[MISS TAPPER *takes* SIBLEY *to* MRS TUDOR, *who is seen to compliment her on her song.*

DUNNYBRIG. [*To* MRS WINDEATT.] Come along. 'Tis getting a bit fuggy in here.

[MISS TAPPER *leaves* SIBLEY *and goes into garden.*

MRS S. Come, Sophie—don't you eat no more. Here's Miss Dench dog-tired, I'm sure, and glad to see the last of us.

[*Exeunt* MR DUNNYBRIG, DR RUNDLE, *and* MRS WINDEATT. PETRONELL *goes after them and* GEORGE *follows her.*

SWEETLAND. [*Who has been sitting by* MARY HEARN.] Shall I get you anything more to eat or drink? [*Goes to table.*

MISS H. I'll have one of they red plums, I think.

[*Exit* SUSAN MAINE.

MR TUDOR. [*Coming to them.*] Ah, Miss Hearn—escaped from your duties for a little while! [*To* MR SWEETLAND, *who is now beside the table regarding his dish of plums.*] Ah, neighbour! I hope I see you well.

SWEETLAND. [*Lifting up his plums.*] I gave her those—finest things on the table.

MR TUDOR. They remind me of our approaching harvest festival. You won't forget the church?

SWEETLAND. Drat the festivals! They come round quicker than Quarter Day. I ain't got no corn this year. Nobody has.

[*Takes the plums to* MISS HEARN.

MR TUDOR. I hope Mrs Windeatt will be kinder.

[*Exeunt* MRS SMERDON, SOPHIE SMERDON, *and* MRS RUNDLE. *They meet* MISS TAPPER *returning.*

Enter SUSAN MAINE *with ices.*

MISS T. Ices are coming into the garden for those that like them. Ask Mrs Tudor first, Susan. Better let Miss Dench carry them. [ARAMINTA *takes ices and goes with* SUSAN *into the garden.*] You have nothing to eat, Vicar.

MR TUDOR. On the contrary, I'm doing well—making a splendid tea. [*Shows half a small biscuit.*

MR COAKER. [*To* RICHARD.] Help me up, Dick, will 'e? Can us smoke in the flower garden, Churdles Ash?

ASH. What's a flower garden for, Henry?

MR COAKER. Right! I'll chance it.

MR TUDOR. Let me give you an arm, Mr Coaker.

[MISS TAPPER *beckons to* ASH. *They go out and* ASH *wheels* MRS TUDOR *off.* MISS TAPPER *goes with them.*

MR COAKER. Thank you kindly, your Reverence. I'd do the same for you. This here fancy food makes me feel so light as a cloud.

MR TUDOR. Really! How remarkable!

RICHARD. I'll look after uncle, your Reverence.

[*Exeunt* MR COAKER *and* RICHARD COAKER.

MISS T. [*Looking in at window, to* MR SWEETLAND.] You'll come and hear the glee-singers?

SWEETLAND. Don't you trouble your head about me—I'm talking to Miss Hearn.

[MISS TAPPER *goes away.*

MISS H. Let's get outside.

SWEETLAND. Have another plum?

Enter GEORGE SMERDON.

MISS H. No, no! enough's as good as a feast. And don't you follow me about so close—else people will say unkind things. You know what the village is.

[*Exeunt* MISS HEARN *and* MR SWEETLAND.

MR TUDOR. [*To* GEORGE SMERDON.] I have heard of your good fortune, George. It is a solemn responsibility, and I hope you won't forget the Giver.

GEORGE. No; I be going to put up a white marble stone to him, when his grave have settled down. I dare say I'll spend twenty pound or more. And did I ought to share the money with my brother Tom, Vicar?

MR TUDOR. That is a serious question I cannot answer in a moment, George.

GEORGE. I ain't getting no fun out of it yet, anyway.

[ARAMINTA, SIBLEY *and* SUSAN *come back from the garden.*

MR TUDOR. The money that gives us most pleasure to spend is that which we devote to others. You will not forget your own parish—I feel sure of that.

[MR TUDOR *goes off. The glee-singers begin in the garden. Enter* DR RUNDLE.

DR RUNDLE. [*Helping himself from the table.*] Now's the time, George!

GEORGE. I ain't hungry to-day.

[GEORGE *goes to garden.*

DR RUNDLE. Now, Miss Sibley, come along.

SIBLEY. I'm looking after Araminta. I'll come presently. [*Exit* DR RUNDLE.

SIBLEY. For goodness' sake sit down and rest, Minta! You'll drop if you don't. [*Enter* CHURDLES ASH.] Sit here and take it easy.

ASH. Give me something to drink. Thank the Lord I ain't a indoor man. I be gasping for air and tobacco.

SUSAN. Tea or coffee, Mr Ash?

ASH. Everything—everything—'tis my turn now. [*Eating.*] Here, stuff one of these down your neck, Minta. There's cream in 'em.

ARAMINTA. I'm sure it have all gone off most glorious—not a hitch, and everybody as happy as kings and queens.

SIBLEY. Except father. There's something the matter with him.

ARAMINTA. And your lovely song—'twas the crown of the party.

Enter MISS TAPPER, *hurriedly.*

MISS T. Fruit—fruit in the garden, please!

[*Exit* MISS TAPPER.

ASH. Darn the old dragon! She'd run the soles off your feet!

SUSAN. Let her wait. A proper tyrant she is.

ARAMINTA. No, no! Now's the moment for fruit.

SIBLEY. Finish your tea first, Minta.

[ASH, ARAMINTA DENCH, SUSAN *and* SIBLEY *pick up dishes of fruit.*

ARAMINTA. I've done.

Enter PETRONELL.

PETRONELL. Where's father?

[*Exit* CHURDLES ASH.

SIBLEY. He went into the garden with Miss Hearn.

[*Exit* SUSAN *and* SIBLEY.

PETRONELL. I'm sick of this, Minta. I never was at such a stupid party.

ARAMINTA. Don't say that. Where's Richard? He'll cheer you up.

PETRONELL. 'Tis for him to find me, I should think—not for me to find him.

Enter GEORGE SMERDON. *Exit* ARAMINTA DENCH.

GEORGE. You might give me a minute. I only came to the party to see you.

PETRONELL. Don't start again on me, there's a good man.

GEORGE. I haven't begun yet. You don't know what you're in for. There's no escape for you. It have got to be said over and over again, till you grasp hold of it.

PETRONELL. I have grasped hold of it.

GEORGE. No, you haven't. You haven't had time. But you will. I'm so solid and steadfast as a rock. I can't change, Petronell.

PETRONELL. I can't change, either.

GEORGE. It may surprise you to know that it grows worse instead of better with me.

PETRONELL. I said 'no' as clear as a girl could speak it.

GEORGE. I ban't built to hear 'no.' I won't hear 'no.' I'm going to be at you as steady as Time, till you say 'yes.' I don't see no other way. 'Twill wear you to a shadow, I shouldn't wonder. But there's no escape.

PETRONELL. It's not reasonable, George.

GEORGE. I don't know nothing about reason. A man like me is far above reason. I'm never beat. I go on my own way like the wind and the wave—never tired. I shall keep offering for you—off and on—till I'm grey-headed, and you've got a foot in

the grave. I only tell you this, Petronell, because you may think I'm like certain other weak chaps that you've choked off at a word.

PETRONELL. Then I see there's but one thing will stop you, George.

GEORGE. There isn't one thing—only death.

PETRONELL. There's got to be one : I love another man—there !

GEORGE. What's his name ?

PETRONELL. You mustn't ask that.

GEORGE. Why not ?

PETRONELL. Oh, you're so difficult, George. You've got no proper feeling where a woman's concerned.

GEORGE. What's his name ? That's what I want to know ; and I will know.

PETRONELL. I can't tell you.

GEORGE. Do he love you ? Have he made the fine love to you what I have ? Would he do all for you I would ?

PETRONELL. I wonder what you would do, if it came to the point.

GEORGE. I'd do all a strong man with five thousand pounds behind him could do.

PETRONELL. It isn't money, George.

GEORGE. You hate farming, so I'd throw it all up and start a shop, because I know you like shops.

PETRONELL. Would you do that ?

GEORGE. Would t'other chap ? Why, I'd get any sort of shop in the world. You should choose what you liked, from fish and poultry to gold watches.

PETRONELL. I'd love a shop.

GEORGE. Then love me and we'll start a shop.

PETRONELL. You can't make yourself love a man.

GEORGE. Why not? If I can love you like a burning fiery furnace, why the hell can't you love me the same?

PETRONELL. Don't I tell you I love somebody else?

GEORGE. Well, keep the shop in your mind. Don't lose sight of the shop.

[PETRONELL *starts and looks towards the window as* RICHARD COAKER *enters, followed by* MISS HEARN.

GEORGE. Him!

PETRONELL. [*Going to* RICHARD.] Was you looking for me?

RICHARD. You're missing all the music.

GEORGE. The music's where her voice be, I should think.

RICHARD. Well done, George! But the music I mean is under the 'monkey puzzle' in the garden.

[*Exeunt* RICHARD *and* PETRONELL.

MISS H. All alone, Mr Smerdon? I'm properly flustered. Such a curious thing! If old Sammy Sweetland haven't fairly took charge of me! What's his game, I wonder? Is he playing at May and December, d'you reckon?

GEORGE. I'm going home. I ain't wanted at this party.

MISS H. Don't say that. There's one glad enough to see you, at any rate.

GEORGE. There's only one here for me.

MISS H. Well, I've had quite enough of it, too. Will you see me to the village?

GEORGE. No. I'm driving along with mother.

MISS H. Are the gipsies at Lane End still?

GEORGE. Yes, they are there—the rogues!

MISS H. [*Eating cakes.*] Such a funny thing! They tell fortunes, you know. I gave an old woman a shilling, and she told me I should be married inside a year—to a handsome, tall, fair man, with blue eyes and high shoulders.

GEORGE. That sounds mighty like old Sweetland.

MISS H. I'm not hunting after fossils, George Smerdon. It sounds to me like somebody else. Let me see your hand.

GEORGE. You can't read 'em?

MISS H. Oh yes, I can. I know the love line, anyway. You've got it. [*She holds his hand.*

GEORGE. Of course I've got it. You don't see a fine, fair maiden with her nose held pretty high, slate-coloured eyes and bright hair, and a very proud walk, as if the ground wasn't good enough?

MISS H. That's it, is it? No, I don't see her. I see a dark girl with a dimple and roguish brown eyes, and a face like a flower.

Enter RICHARD *and* SIBLEY.

GEORGE. I hate they dark women. Leave go my hand. [*Rises.*

SIBLEY. Father is looking everywhere for you, Miss Hearn.

MISS H. [*To* GEORGE.] There! What did I tell you?

GEORGE. Jump at him then. [*To* SIBLEY.] I'm sick of this, and I ain't enjoying myself. I'm going back home now. Where's mother and Sophie?

RICHARD. Not enjoying yourself, George?

GEORGE. Don't you speak to me no more, Richard Coaker. I've done with you. 'Tis war to the knife between us, and now you know it.

MISS H. [*Looking off.*] There he is, hunting for me like a hawk after a sparrow.

[*Exeunt* MISS HEARN *and* GEORGE SMERDON *to the garden.*

RICHARD. Well—what d'you think of that! What have I done to vex George?

SIBLEY. He's troubled seemingly.

RICHARD. But why with me? His money be going to ruin that man.

SIBLEY. Poor George!

RICHARD. I ain't sorry for him. But I'm terrible sorry for myself.

SIBLEY. Why, Dick?

RICHARD. Because I'm such an everyday, stupid sort of chap—no money and never done nothing to name.

SIBLEY. Every lover's done the biggest thing in the whole world in the eyes of the girl who loves him.

RICHARD. And what's that?

SIBLEY. Why, fall in love with her! That's the mightiest thing of all—if she feels the same.

RICHARD. And waste of time if she don't. No doubt George Smerdon would chuck up all his money if Petronell loved him.

SIBLEY. Her heart's gone.

RICHARD. Solemn truth? That's terrible interesting. And does she know what the man's feeling?

SIBLEY. I reckon so. But he hangs fire a bit.

RICHARD. If you be in love, you get terrible quick to mark the signs in another person, no doubt. If Petronell can see a man loves her, then—my girl might see the same—eh?

SIBLEY. Naturally.

RICHARD. And wouldn't think none the worse of me?

SIBLEY. Of course not.

RICHARD. Why—then—

Enter MR SWEETLAND *and* MISS HEARN. PETRONELL *appears at window.* SIBLEY *joins her and both go off.*

SWEETLAND. Tell 'em to harness up, Dick Coaker, please. I've promised to give Miss Hearn a lift home. [*Exit* RICHARD COAKER.

MISS H. 'Tis a silly, fussy affair—just what you'd expect from a silly, fussy old maid.

SWEETLAND. Never mind her. I came here a purpose to see you, so just wait a minute. I'll shut

the doors. They men make such a yowling, you can't hear yourself speak.

[*Shuts doors. The noise of the glee-singers ceases.*

Miss H. What did she want music for? Every woman would sooner hear herself talk than another person sing.

Sweetland. Of course she would—if she'd got a voice like yours.

Miss H. I nearly died of laughing to see Tabby Tapper sucking up to the Vicar's mother—just because she's an 'honourable.'

Sweetland. [*Looking at table.*] I'd give something for a thimbleful of whisky. But of course there's nothing like that here.

Miss H. No doubt she's got a bottle hid somewhere. D'you believe in fortune-telling, Mr Sweetland? I had mine told by a gipsy, and she said I was going to be a wife inside a year.

Sweetland. Well done her! I'm sure I hope that's true!

Miss H. I've been in a twitter about it ever since. A fine chap with high shoulders and blue eyes, and very well to do, and——

Sweetland. That sounds mighty like somebody I know, Mary.

Miss H. Of course you do. So do we all.

Sweetland. If I looked in the looking-glass I should see him—eh?

Miss H. [*Giggles.*] You—you! Well, I never You—at your age!

SWEETLAND. You don't want to marry a boy, do you?

MISS H. [*Much annoyed.*] Well, and why not? 'Tis a way with boys to marry girls, ain't it?

SWEETLAND. Girls! Have you got the face to call yourself a girl?

MISS H. [*Getting excited.*] And what the mischief should I call myself? What do you call me?

SWEETLAND. Full blown and a bit over—that's what I call you. And if you wasn't a back number like myself—like myself, Mary Hearn—I shouldn't be sitting here along with you now.

MISS H. Me—me a back number! And you call yourself a gentleman, I suppose! Perhaps you'll be surprised to hear, Mr Samuel Sweetland, that next birthday I'm——

SWEETLAND. Hush! Don't touch figures. Don't palter with the truth. I know. 'Tis in the church register, and not an hour ago I looked your date up there. You was born in——

MISS H. Coward! A beastly, poking, prying jackdaw, that's what you are!

SWEETLAND. And what are you? Who opens the letters at the post-office? I never believed it till now; but now I do. And if you can call me a 'poking, prying jackdaw,' Mary Hearn, I'm wasting your time and mine. You've done it now! It's all over—you've ruined yourself—you've lost the chance of a lifetime, you stupid woman.

MISS H. 'Tis libel to say I touch the letters, and I'll have you up for it.

SWEETLAND. No, you won't—you wouldn't dare. There's too many think the same. I can look at you now without a throb or a pang. You've changed, and I see the truth of you. 'Tis just as if you'd sent a bit of ice down my back now. Here was I—a man out of the common, by all accounts—and you—a good enough woman, though too fond of dressing your mutton lamb fashion.

MISS H. You dare say that!

SWEETLAND. I was going to dare all things. I was coming afore you in all the lonely dignity of the widowed state. I was just going to say something as you've never heard afore, Mary Hearn, and never will again.

MISS H. [*Staring at him.*] I don't know what you're talking about.

SWEETLAND. Oh yes, you do—nobody better. Trust a woman for that. She smells an offer of marriage quicker than a hound scents a fox. I came expecting to find good value. I thought to see a high-minded female, of a certain age, that I could look to *as* a female.

MISS H. Well, what then?

SWEETLAND. I came as a Christian widow man to a Christian woman.

MISS H. Is this a nightmare?

SWEETLAND. Your hat is. Your hat would have been enough for any self-respecting person, without a word from you. You've wrecked yourself and lost the chance of a lifetime—that's what you've done. You're the sort that be so busy running after the

boys, that you miss the men—that's what you are. And me one of they people a little child can lead, though a regiment of soldiers can't drive.

MISS H. Are you offering marriage, or ain't you?

SWEETLAND. Certainly not. Not now. I'm only telling you the sort that wanted you and was going to ask you to come to Applegarth Farm afore the Christmas holly be cut. But not now. It's all off now—and so will I be. [*Rising.*] You don't want to hear a 'beastly jackdaw' no more, of course. [MISS HEARN *begins to heave and make strange noises.*] I don't care a damn for they noises. You can roll your eyes and gasp and gurgle, or stand on your silly head if you want to. There's the truth, and now you know it.

MISS H. [*Laughing and losing her self-control.*] You—you—you old sheep—a thing kept in cotton wool by your late wife—you to come to a woman in all her prime and beauty—you to run after me!

SWEETLAND. And don't you think you was the first, because you wasn't!

MISS H. [*Dancing heavily round him and pointing at him.*] There—there—you've given yourself away properly now! No, I wasn't the first to fling your nasty love back in your face—and I shan't be the last. *I shan't be the last,* Sammy Sweetland! You mind that!

SWEETLAND. Bah! grapes are sour! You're mad to think what you've lost, you idiot!

MISS H. [*Flinging herself on the sofa and going into hysterics.*] Help! Help! Save me! [*Shrieks wildly.*

[*The French windows open and* Miss Tapper *enters, followed by* Mr Henry Coaker.

Mr Coaker. Guy Fawkes and angels! what's Sammy doing to postmistress?

Miss H. Take him away! Take the beast away.

Enter Valiant Dunnybrig *and* Mrs Windeatt.

Miss T. Where's Dr Rundle? Quick! Quick!

[*Outside the glee-singers are singing* '*The Three Chafers.*' *Enter* Richard Coaker, Petronell *and* Sibley.

Miss T. The doctor! The doctor!

[Richard *runs back to garden.* Sibley *and* Petronell *go to* Mr Sweetland.

Sweetland. God's my Judge I was only talking sense to the fool.

Mr Coaker. But what was you *doing*, Samuel?

Enter Dr Rundle, *followed by* Mrs Smerdon, Sophie Smerdon, Mr Tudor *and* Richard Coaker.

Dunnybrig. Get a pail of water and dash it in her face.

Enter Araminta Dench.

Dr Rundle. Loosen her stays and pull her hat off. She'll be all right in a moment. Give her air and put her feet up.

MR TUDOR. Is there any danger, Doctor? If so, I——

DR RUNDLE. She's all right.

[*The* WOMEN *attend to* MISS HEARN. MR SWEETLAND *sits down alone and disregarded. Enter* CHURDLES ASH *and* SUSAN MAINE.

MR COAKER. Here—here—come away, you men—this is no place for us.

[*The* MEN *move away together.* MISS HEARN'S *screams subside.* ARAMINTA DENCH *goes to* MR SWEETLAND, *who has brought out his paper and is looking at it. Outside, at the door, appear the* GLEE-SINGERS, *led by* MR GREGSON. *They peer in, but are still loudly singing* '*The Three Chafers.*' *They persist for a few moments after the curtain falls.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

The scene is the same as in Act I., with slight modifications of detail.

[ARAMINTA DENCH *and* SIBLEY *discovered.* SIBLEY *is rolling paste and making an apple pie.* ARAMINTA *sits peeling potatoes and dropping them into a saucepan of water. The peel she drops into a pail.*

SIBLEY. I suppose Churdles knows when the train comes in?

ARAMINTA. He knows.

SIBLEY. Father writes as though he wasn't any the better for his little change. And Petronell won't be in a very good temper either.

ARAMINTA. She only went to Dawlish to see if Dick Coaker would be drawn down after her.

SIBLEY. I can't understand why he wasn't. 'Twas a great chance for him.

ARAMINTA. We're all wrong about Richard, Sibley —all wrong. I'm terrible sorry for Petronell.

SIBLEY. It makes me angry with Richard—almost. I told him as plain as I dared at Miss Tapper's party that he'd only got to ask. [*She sighs.*] There—talk of something else.

Enter CHURDLES ASH.

ASH. No news of master ?

SIBLEY. We haven't heard this morning.

ASH. Then he's drawn blank again.

SIBLEY. Whatever do you mean, Churdles ?

ASH. I mean the Dawlish widow at 'The Ring o' Bells.' Be everybody blind but me ? Did he go to Dawlish to hear the niggers on the beach ? No—he went for a wife and haven't got her. And he'll come back in a proper tantrum, mark me.

ARAMINTA. What be the women made of nowadays ?

ASH. Same old beastly stuff they always was. There's only one thing they're good for—to be mothers and bear boys.

ARAMINTA. Ah ! that's the way you silly old bachelors talk. Nought else for us to do but to bear boys ?

ASH. Nought else—except to bear girls. Women be wanted for the next generation. They ain't no manner of use to their own. I'm ashamed of Samuel Sweetland offering himself at sale prices all round the country. Everybody's talking about and making fun of him. 'Tis a disgrace to us males that he can sink to go among 'em hat in hand—only to get laughed at for his pains.

SIBLEY. Whatever are you saying?

ARAMINTA. [*Frowning at* CHURDLES ASH *and shaking her head at him.*] Don't ask him—a sour old curmudgeon. He hates the women. You'll hear no good of us from him.

[*A knock at the door.* SIBLEY, *who has finished making her apple pie, goes to the door and admits* GEORGE SMERDON.

GEORGE. Morning—morning! When do you start for the station, Churdles?

ASH. In quarter of an hour.

GEORGE. I'll drive down along with you, if you please.

ARAMINTA. So you shall then; and try to make him see a bit of sense, George. [*Picks up her pail with potato peel and the saucepan with potatoes.*] Come on, Ash; I want you afore you start.

ASH. [*Takes a whip from the corner of the kitchen.*] I be going to put the hoss in now.

[*Exeunt* ARAMINTA DENCH *and* CHURDLES ASH.

GEORGE. I went down.

SIBLEY. So I hear, George.

GEORGE. Yes, to Dawlish I went, and had two walks with her. Once we tramped along by the sea, and once we went up over the Moor. Walked her off her legs, I did. Pretty hopeful—eh?

SIBLEY. Yes, but——

GEORGE. And she likewise accepted a bag of prawns—a good sign that.

SIBLEY. Was she cheerful?

GEORGE. No, I wouldn't say she was cheerful—no more was your father. He spoke a lot of harsh things against the women, and Petronell had her knife into the men. They be such clever people.

But the cleverest people ain't always clever enough to be happy.

SIBLEY. That's one thing makes it worth while being a fool, George. You can be happy, whatever else you can't be.

GEORGE. Not always. Look at me.

SIBLEY. You're no fool.

GEORGE. First cousin to it; and yet by no means happy. But I'm fighting every inch of the way—I'm hanging on like a bull-dog, Sibley. I've got my teeth in her, you may say. [*Takes a whelk shell from his pocket.*] Do 'e see that shell?

SIBLEY. Yes.

GEORGE. 'Tis a whelk as I catched when we was walking over the rocks at low tide. And I had it cooked, and your sister was so terrible kind as to eat it. I shall keep that shell to my dying day.

[*Puts it in his pocket.*

SIBLEY. I know you care a lot for her.

GEORGE. She's everything—everything in the world.

SIBLEY. I wish I could help you.

GEORGE. I wish you could. Nobody can help me. 'Tis a job have got to be done single-handed. I'm at it night and day, you might say—except when I'm asleep. How my brain stands it, I don't know, but I go battling on.

Enter CHURDLES ASH *and* RICHARD COAKER.

RICHARD. Morning, Sibley!

ASH. Here's Dick Coaker looking for Dr Rundle, and can't find him. [*Exit* ASH.

GEORGE. He's out with the hounds in his pink coat. I see him and Mrs Windeatt and Valiant Dunnybrig and a score more riding to the meet.

SIBLEY. What's wrong? [*Going.*

RICHARD. Only about some hay my old man sold him when we was at Miss Tapper's flare up. Don't you go, Sibley, please.

SIBLEY. [*Taking the pie and implements from the kitchen table.*] I'll be back in a minute, if you want me. [*Exit into the house.*

[GEORGE *and* RICHARD *look at each other in doubt.* GEORGE *shows the more feeling, puffs his cheeks and gets red.*

RICHARD. Fine day, George Smerdon.

GEORGE. I don't want no words with you, Richard Coaker. 'Tis very certain us can't be friends, so we'd better keep clear of each other till the battle's won, or lost.

RICHARD. And why the mischief can't we be friends, George?

GEORGE. Because we can't.

RICHARD. Been to Dawlish, I hear?

GEORGE. Yes, I did go to Dawlish. But you didn't—that's one up against you, be sure of that.

RICHARD. Why the devil should I go to Dawlish?

GEORGE. What a question! What's the good o' talking? Ain't we bitter as death after the same woman?

RICHARD. Good Lord!—you don't want her too?

GEORGE. With every drop of blood I want her. Like a tiger I want her; and your love-making, so to call it, is the moon to my sun. A bird in the hedge makes better love than you. To let her go out of your sight for a week and never to cross the road after her! Call that love?

RICHARD. Man alive, she wasn't at Dawlish!

GEORGE. Wasn't at Dawlish! Didn't I catch this whelk with these hands out of a pool at her feet; and didn't I have the creature cooked; and didn't she eat it? I dare say you'd like that shell! You'd have to kill me first, Richard Coaker, afore you'd get it!

[*Shows whelk shell, and returns it to his pocket.*

RICHARD. That was only Petronell, George.

GEORGE. 'Only Petronell'! *Only* Petronell!

RICHARD. Good Lord! are you chattering about her?

GEORGE. And who else on the face of the earth be there to chatter about?

RICHARD. To think of that now! My dear man, I haven't got no use for Petronell.

GEORGE. Then why the mischief be you always dogging her footsteps? Why be you always at Applegarth? Why are you up here now, waiting for her to come back, and too slack to go to the station to meet her and help with the parcels, like I shall?

RICHARD. Fancy you thinking that!

GEORGE. 'Tisn't only me; everybody thinks it. Her father thinks it, for he told me so; and Miss

Dench thinks it; and that slip of a girl Sibley thinks it, and—and she thinks it herself for that matter.

RICHARD. I don't want Petronell, and never did want her.

GEORGE. Then the sooner she knows it the better. [*Spits on his hands.*] And to-day she shall know it.

RICHARD. I'm after somebody else, and always have been.

GEORGE. Bah! There ain't nobody else.

Enter CHURDLES ASH *and* SIBLEY *from different doors.*

ASH. Come on, George. I'm off.

[*Exit* CHURDLES ASH.

RICHARD. Good luck, George!

GEORGE. She hasn't got a leg to stand upon now, that I can see.

RICHARD. You hunt her down then.

[*Exit* GEORGE *after* ASH.

SIBLEY. Poor George!

RICHARD. Rich George!

SIBLEY. 'Tis to be very poor to love a girl that don't love you, Richard.

RICHARD. Not the only one in that fix.

SIBLEY. [*Laughing.*] Easier to know your trouble than your luck, seemingly.

RICHARD. I'm glad I met George. I've told him something that have put life into him.

SIBLEY. I wish, for Petronell's sake, you could

be a bit more like other people. Excuse my plain speaking. But—but—you'd better be off after Dr Rundle.

RICHARD. I don't want him. 'Twas only an excuse to come up here.

SIBLEY. She ain't home yet.

RICHARD. Oh yes, she is.

SIBLEY. I ought to know.

RICHARD. So you ought, sure enough.

SIBLEY. Why didn't you go to Dawlish?

RICHARD. Why should I? 'Twas only Petronell there.

SIBLEY. 'Only Petronell'!

RICHARD. 'Only Petronell'! You're as bad as George Smerdon.

SIBLEY. What more do you want than Petronell?

RICHARD. I'll tell you. I'm here to tell you afore they come home. I suppose a little quiet maiden like you be dazzled by Petronell, same as George Smerdon and a good few other people. They can't imagine a man liking a nightingale better than a peacock.

SIBLEY. She's not a peacock.

RICHARD. Leave her. It seems that your father, and Miss Dench, and another fool here and there, all thought I came to Applegarth after your sister.

SIBLEY. Naturally. Who was there to come for else? Dear Petronell thought——

RICHARD. The same. I know. But why? I never said a word—I never looked a word—I never squeezed her hand even. But because I was dumb

and stupid as a pig along with you, and gay and easy along with her, they thought . . . there—it shows how a man may be misread. And that's why, when Petronell appeared, you was always off like a shot out of a gun, I suppose?

SIBLEY. Two's company, Richard.

RICHARD. And damn bad company if they're the wrong 'uns. 'Twas because you always bolted when you got half a chance that I hung fire.

SIBLEY. I thought you came for her sake.

RICHARD. I came for my own—and for hope to please you, Sibley.

SIBLEY. What a staggering thing! I've always been wishful to befriend you—with Petronell.

RICHARD. And little knew the thoughts I thought and the cusses I cussed.

SIBLEY. This be treason to sister.

RICHARD. Don't say that. She'll understand, if George can make her. George always says what he means, whatever his faults. He'll worry her now, like a terrier worries a rat. And oh, Sib, I do love you so dear—wrapped up in the very shadow of you, Sib. I've kissed the chair you sat on afore to-day—I have. A good year and more it have been going on now. When d'you think it began?

SIBLEY. I don't know, Richard.

RICHARD. In church. I happened to pitch alongside you and you offered me a share of your hymn-book; and when I see your little thumb alongside my great big one—'Twas a most touching sight and I never got over it.

SIBLEY. Your thumb was grubby, I remember.

RICHARD. God forgive me—I daresay it was.

SIBLEY. I'm thinking on my sister. This is a fearful thing, Dick.

RICHARD. Think on me—I ain't a fearful thing—I'm the proudest man in Little Silver.

SIBLEY. I haven't took you yet.

RICHARD. Come here, you dinky dear—come into my arms! Oh, I've never been properly alive afore! 'Tis all right with Petronell. She'll hate me for a minute and then she'll calm down. George be worth fifty of me.

SIBLEY. Don't you say that.

RICHARD. In cash—that's all. I'm so good as him in every other way. And we'll be friends—me and Petronell. She's only got to think it over, then she'll understand. Wasn't her fault. 'Twas yours, and your father's, and Minta's.

SIBLEY. When she hears you love me—oh dear!

RICHARD. I'll warrant she'll come well out of it. She's made of fine stuff. She likes George better than you guess. I saw her with him at Miss Tapper's spread.

SIBLEY. I never dreamed of this—I never looked so high as you.

RICHARD. I was pluckier. I did look so high as you, my pretty bird. But you seemed a terrible long way off; and yet here you be in my arms—and glad to be! Say you be glad.

SIBLEY. Is it right? Is it honest, Richard?

RICHARD. Honest as the sunshine. Kiss me, for

God's sake! And loving me a little bit all the time, I'll swear.

SIBLEY. I always loved you when I dared to think of you. I couldn't help it. But I wept salt tears for my wickedness when I did.

RICHARD. Never let me see no tears on your face —else I'll lick 'em off.

SIBLEY. You darling Dick!

[*They are kissing each other when* ARAMINTA *comes in.*

ARAMINTA. My gracious! [*Going.*

RICHARD. Don't go! don't go! We ain't ashamed of it, Miss Dench.

SIBLEY. [*Running to* ARAMINTA.] Oh, Minta, Minta!—he came here for me, and he's offered, and I've took him. For God's sake say it ban't wicked to Petronell.

ARAMINTA. My dear—my dear little Sibley! You crafty toad, Richard Coaker.

RICHARD. I know it. Cunning as a bushel of snakes. But I've got her. She's caught. The storm have been brewing for a month o' Sundays, Miss Dench, and now it's busted.

ARAMINTA. A lot of blind sillies we've been! If us didn't all think—goodness knows why——

RICHARD. If you'd only let me alone to mind my own business; but you was always heaving t'other girl at my head.

SIBLEY. Am I right, Minta?

ARAMINTA. Of course you're right. We were wrong—not you.

SIBLEY. I was always terribly addicted to Richard.

RICHARD. And so you always ran away from me, as if I was the plague in a pair o' boots. I'm off now.

SIBLEY. Don't you go—'tis you must break it to father. I don't dare.

RICHARD. Never fear for that. I'll break it to him fast enough. I'll just run across and tell Uncle Henry—then I'll come back. 'Twill be meat and drink to Uncle Henry. He's awful fond of you.

SIBLEY. Don't be long, then. I can't bear you out of my sight now.

RICHARD. I'll never be out o' your sight no more very soon. [*Exit* RICHARD COAKER.

ARAMINTA. My own little pet! Oh, I'm so glad for 'e. 'Tis a brave, bright bit o' news. 'Twill cheer up father.

SIBLEY. But Petronell——?

ARAMINTA. She'll know where she is now. How easy it is to read a thing afterwards! We've been a lot of zanies!

SIBLEY. But Petronell——?

ARAMINTA. She won't want him no more. 'Twas only his holding off made her so coming on.

[*A knock at the door.* ARAMINTA *answers it.*

ARAMINTA. Good-morning, Miss Tapper.

Enter MISS THIRZA TAPPER.

MISS T. Good-morning, Araminta! Good-morning, Sibley! You expected me? You had my post-card?

SIBLEY. So I had, and quite forgot it, Miss Tapper! The harvest decorations?

MISS T. Your dear father promised me quantities of laurel and yew. I have come in the Vicar's pony carriage to fetch it.

SIBLEY. So you shall, Miss Tapper. Churdles Ash will be back from the station directly. You shall choose what you want.

ARAMINTA. I hope you've quite got over it, Miss, and feel none the worse?

MISS T. My little affair? I've not got over it at all. It was a terrible strain—so much happened in such a short time. I was so sorry for dear Mr Sweetland—that outrageous person. I shall never forgive myself. [VOICES *outside.*

SWEETLAND (*Off*). Damn it, Ash; you get clumsier every day of your life!

SIBLEY. There's father!

ARAMINTA. He's come! Master's home again!

MISS T. Then I may get the opportunity to say a sympathetic word or two to dear Mr Sweetland. I owe it to him.

[*Door thrown open.* MR SAMUEL SWEETLAND *and* PETRONELL *enter from without.* CHURDLES ASH *follows them with parcels and portmanteaux.*

SWEETLAND. [*Obviously in a bad temper.*] You! Ah, Sibley! [SIBLEY *kisses him. Aside to* ARAMINTA.] What's Tapper doing here?

PETRONELL. [*Listlessly.*] Here we are.

[*Kisses* SIBLEY

SIBLEY. Miss Tapper's come about the green stuff for the decorations.

SWEETLAND. Pity you couldn't choose a more fitting time.

MISS T. Don't say that. Perhaps this is the right moment.

SWEETLAND. I wish I knew the right moment. I haven't found it yet.

ASH. 'Tis the right moment for clipping the yew hedge, and if you'll come along, Miss, I'll do it now afore dinner.

[ARAMINTA *is busy with parcels and luggage.*

MISS T. Thank you, Mr Ash.

SIBLEY. Petronell, dear, come in the garden a minute before you take off your jacket—such a wonderful thing! I want to tell you first of all. Have you seen George?

PETRONELL. Have I seen George? When do I see anything but George? I wish some other people were as much in earnest as that man.

SIBLEY. Perhaps they are.

[*Exeunt* SIBLEY *and* PETRONELL.

SWEETLAND. [*To* ASH.] Cut her a dollop of evergreens and send her going.

ASH. [*Takes off his coat and hat and hangs them up.*] Come on, Miss. [*Exit* CHURDLES ASH.

MISS T. I have the Vicar's pony carriage at the front gate. I shall see you again, dear Mr Sweetland. Indeed I wish to speak to you. It's on my conscience to do so. [*Exit* MISS TAPPER.

SWEETLAND. [*Puts his box of jujubes and his pipe*

on the mantelshelf.] That woman have no feeling for time or place! [*Flings himself in a chair.*] Well, 'tis all over, Minta. The game's up—I'm broken—I'm done for. [*Takes paper out of his pocket.*] That's the last of 'em.

ARAMINTA. Don't talk like that—a brave creature like you.

SWEETLAND. Truth's truth, and I see it now. The whole power of the female sex be drawn up against me. Some enemy's put the evil eye on me, I believe—else it couldn't be they all. . . . 'Tis very bad for one's character. My self-respect have gone.

ARAMINTA. Don't you say that, Sweetland. I won't hear a strong, sensible man like you say that.

SWEETLAND. It's hit me hard—cruel hard.

ARAMINTA. Make light of it, my dear, and look forward.

SWEETLAND. If you make light of your misfortunes, everybody else be only too jolly glad to do the same. I won't make light of it. 'Tisn't a light matter.

ARAMINTA. Mrs Mercy Bassett didn't see her way?

SWEETLAND. 'Twas touch and go. I thought I'd got her. It promised all right, though she's aged a good bit since I last saw her. She had no feeling against me, and I felt thankful for small mercies and went at her in a humble spirit.

ARAMINTA. What was her objection?

SWEETLAND. She couldn't tell me. I put a lot of thought and cleverness into it. I was patient, Minta.

I planned it all out, and showed how her daughter's husband could keep on 'The Ring o' Bells' and leave her free to come to me. But she is one of they maddening women who can't make up their mind. I believe she honestly tried to, but she couldn't. She messed about—now hot, now cold. Couldn't say 'yes,' and wouldn't say 'no.' My nerves was like a frog under a harrow. But I was patience made alive. Perhaps I wouldn't have been so patient if I hadn't felt 'twas my last chance. I spent a good bit of money one way and another. I took her up to Exeter for a treat, and showed her the cathedral and the museum. She liked they Egyptian mummies at the museum far better than the cathedral A morbid woman. I was generous, Minta, and gave her a bottle of sherry wine with her dinner. Cost four bob, it did.

ARAMINTA. Who could do more?

SWEETLAND. And she drank it; and instead of lifting her up, it cast her down.

ARAMINTA. What a pity! It do with some people.

SWEETLAND. She liked my appearance and manners and ways and gift of speech.

ARAMINTA. Of course she did.

SWEETLAND. But she was afraid of leaving the sea-side, because of a catch in her breathing parts. It takes her of a night.

ARAMINTA. Dartmoor air be the best in the world.

SWEETLAND. So I told her. I listened to all her silly objections and didn't show so much as a pinch of temper.

ARAMINTA. I'm sure you didn't.

SWEETLAND. Because beggars can't be choosers. But she broke me down at last. I got full up with cranks and whimseys, and the manhood flashed out in me, and I told her I was off. I also told her that she might go to hell for a husband.

ARAMINTA. Oh, dear!—'twas all over then, of course?

SWEETLAND. Far from it. My language braced her up. She very near flung herself into my arms; but not quite. Then she relapsed and wept a bucket and didn't sleep all night—so her daughter tells me. And this morning, there she was on the platform, to see me and Petronell off. She brought a nosegay of roses and dahlias as a parting present. She was sniffing and blowing her nose; and she waved her handkerchief to the last, then put it to her eyes. Looking back I'm glad she said 'No.' She's too weak and floppy. I'd be the oak to any woman's ivy in reason; but she'd choke me. I want a woman, not a jellyfish.

ARAMINTA. You poor man! 'Tis enough to weaken your faith in the whole pack of us.

SWEETLAND. No—I don't say that no more. The fault is mine, not theirs. I'm a difficult man—I see that. Too high-strung, too noisy, too vain. 'Tis a very unrestful state for the soul to see its faults so clear. There's something all wrong with me; and the women see it and fight shy. You'd think the farm might tempt them, if the farmer can't; but no man, when he goes courting, likes to think

he's only a nasty powder hid in a bit of jam. Though that's how most women regard us, no doubt. I'm very low-spirited about it. I don't much want to go on living, Minta, if I'm never to be wed no more.

ARAMINTA. You must pull yourself together. There's as good and better than these.

SWEETLAND. I know it—that's the hard thing I'm far too sensible to pretend there ain't plenty of proper women wandering about and open to a fair offer. But I've had my share. I've had my Tibby. I shall never get another now.

ARAMINTA. I'll wager there's a fine, useful creature waiting for you yet. You'll have a splendid triumph the very next time, I shouldn't wonder.

SWEETLAND. I've got a lot of faults, and these misadventures have showed 'em up only too bitter clear. But there's good in me yet, Minta.

ARAMINTA. Who knows that better than we do?

SWEETLAND. I haven't reached up home fifty-six year old without learning some sense. The truth is that I've been thinking too much of myself—not enough about other people.

ARAMINTA. We all do. 'Tis human nature to put ourselves first.

SWEETLAND. You don't. 'Twas you opened my eyes to it. You put everybody else first. Your——

ARAMINTA. Don't waste time praising me—I'm nobody. Let's think what to do next.

SWEETLAND. You may be a nobody, but you're a good Christian nobody, Minta, and a proper big-hearted nobody, and a nobody with a marvellous

trick of seeing the best side of people. And you mind your own business, and you practise a lot and preach nothing, which be a darned rare thing in this world.

ARAMINTA. [*Reflecting and not heeding him.*] Have you ever thought about that nice woman, Jane Cherry, the huckster's sister?

SWEETLAND. No, I haven't, and I ain't going to. What's Jane Cherry to me? Listen, Minta. Confession is good for the soul. I have seen all my silly faults very clear of late. There's no place like the lonely sea-shore to show you what a poor thing you are. Short-tempered and fierce, selfish and headlong, wild to make everybody bend to my will. I won't take 'no' for an answer; and what's the result? I've got 'no' for an answer all round. I've been stamping on the people's corns, and then, when they stamp on mine, I get rude and wicked to them. I'm sore—sick and sore with myself—and you've helped to make me so. Yes—you, far more than these other women, with their foolish little ways and fancies and nonsense. They don't throw no light on character. They only make a noise. But you be a steadfast glass in which a man may see the truth of himself, if he's minded to.

ARAMINTA. Never mind that. I be proud to be useful to you and yours in my small way. And I hope you'll always let me. Jane Cherry——

SWEETLAND. Araminta, list to me. I be sudden and rash as usual, for what I'm going to say only come over me in the train an hour ago. I hardly

dare ope my mouth, because with all your self-respect and fine feelings and proper pride, you'll very likely rage to hear it. But there is a woman—one woman——

ARAMINTA. Well done! I'm glad you feel that I'll help you heart and soul, if 'tis in my power to do so.

SWEETLAND. 'Tis in your power, no doubt. But what will you say when I tell you her name? You'll say, 'Here's a man as be offering second-hand goods. Here's a poor, despised creature as be flinging his shattered remains at my feet, after every other woman in the world has spurned him.'

ARAMINTA. Don't matter a button what I'd say. Who is she? If she's clever and sensible, she wouldn't say that—even if she knew your misfortunes.

SWEETLAND. Let me speak. I'm not talking about any other woman; I'm talking about you. 'Tis in no vain-glorious and puffed-up spirit that I stand here, Minta. My heart be on its knees, and God knows it. I'm offering myself so humble as a worm, and I ain't in the least hopeful—far from it. Hope's gone. If I'd come to you first, I'd have been a wise man; but wisdom only followed failure, as it so often does. And I come to you last, and I daresay you'll even feel I'm insulting you to come at all. A very poor figure I cut, no doubt—like a storm-foundered ship trying to beat into harbour afore she sinks. And why such a rare piece as you should be a harbour for me, be blessed if

I know. You will be within your right to scorn me—and——

[*Clears his throat.*

[ARAMINTA *goes to mantelshelf and gets his lozenges. She gives them to him and he takes one.*

SWEETLAND. So there 'tis. My eyes are open and I see that while I was climbing the hedge, the flower was at my feet. And I do believe—I do humbly believe—— But stop me if you've heard too much. Don't think you'll make me angry if you say 'no.' I'm tamed to hear 'no.' I expect 'no.' I don't see how you can well say anything else to such a man. But I'd like to mention one thing in my favour, Minta. A little child can lead me——

ARAMINTA. I know that.

SWEETLAND. Though a regiment of soldiers wouldn't drive me. But we can't escape the yoke, though we may lead the team. I'd proudly bend under your yoke. It wouldn't be very heavy. A man's a garden and some women have the cleverness to get good crops and brave flowers out of him; and others fetch up nothing but weeds, because they sow nothing but weeds. But you—you'd find me breaking out in roses and lilies, Minta. I grant there haven't been much signs of 'em lately; but they be only waiting for your hand.

ARAMINTA. You'd wed me, Samuel Sweetland?

SWEETLAND. That would I, Araminta, and do my mightiest to be worthy. Not good enough by a thousand miles—though I may have been for the others—*quite* good enough for them. But not for

you. 'Tis like the starling offering to wed the golden plover—me offering for you. I've been running after Jack-o'-lanterns, to my own damage and discredit; but now I'm seeking the steadfast light. I'm a many-sided fool, and life's showed it; but this be a wise man's thought and sent by God into my mind. Yes, I'll dare to say that, Araminta; for it have pleased Him to show you to me in your true colours. And they ain't the humble dirt-colours you always 'ray yourself in, but they be bright as the sunshine and the spring flowers. You're a wonder and I'm a scorn.

ARAMINTA. Don't you say that. No wonder me, and no scorn you. Just an everyday man and woman, no better nor worse than their neighbours. I've known you for a real good chap many a year now.

SWEETLAND. If you've seen the best of me, Minta, you've seen the worst of me too. But bad's the best. No, I don't deserve one kind word from you. I deserve nought and ask all.

ARAMINTA. Be you sure you mean this? 'Tis fearful sudden.

SWEETLAND. Like all conversions. The Lord works same as the lightning, and don't give warning where He's going to strike and wake sense in a man's heart. I mean it; from my soul I mean it. I can do better in the future than I've done in the past, —and I will I'm not too old to mend. I may even rise up to be good enough for such a gracious woman as you. Such charity as you've got covers

a multitude of sins, Minta. Can it cover mine?

[*He lifts his hands to her. A pause.*

SWEETLAND. No—I reckon it can't. I'm asking too much. Forgive me.

ARAMINTA. I'll take you, Sweetland.

SWEETLAND. My God! You mean it?

ARAMINTA. I mean it. 'Tis a solemn and great uplifting. But if you can rise to it, so can I. Us know each other's tempers very well—our strength and our weakness—and give and take be the whole art of marriage, so far as I can see from the outside. [*Gives him her hand.*] I'll enter in, Samuel; I'll enter in with trust and hope—and proud to enter in along with such a man as you.

SWEETLAND. You're a blessed pattern of woman—light in the world's twilight, the likes of you, and always have been. And if you repent this bit of work, then may I lose my salvation.

ARAMINTA. A shattering surprise for your maidens.

SWEETLAND. Brave news for them and all the world. I'd like to go to the top of the church tower and shout it out louder than the bells. And now—now this minute—to mark the change, you must blossom out afore them, my dear woman, same as the sun from behind a cloud. There's nought staggers people and convinces 'em against their will like their own eyes. You must go a lot finer from this hour—from this very hour.

ARAMINTA. Churdles Ash says that we change our clothes—not our claws.

SWEETLAND. None ever saw your claws; and none ever saw you in clothes worth the name.

ARAMINTA. Mercy me! What about my Sundays?

SWEETLAND. 'Tis only one sad-coloured gown instead of another. Now list what you must do. Afore my dear Tibby went she'd laid in a brave, flame-new party dress, and never once wore it.

ARAMINTA. She did—for Jane Westaway's wedding she bought it.

SWEETLAND. And went to wear her heavenly robes afore the day came.

ARAMINTA. And she wished for me to have the new frock—bade me take it. 'Twould fit me proper, she said.

SWEETLAND. But you never wore it?

ARAMINTA. Good powers, no! 'tis much too fine.

SWEETLAND. You get into they clothes this moment. I order you, Minta! And deck your hair a trifle more dashing too.

ARAMINTA. I can't, Samuel—I don't know how.

SWEETLAND. There's nothing you can't do if you try—nothing you wouldn't do to please me. I be going to do countless rare things to pleasure you, Minta—thousands of 'em—so just this one—now—quick, afore Tapper goes. 'Twill be such a noble sight for her to report in the parish.

ARAMINTA. Think of looking at myself in the glass!

SWEETLAND. You'll see something as will astonish you. So set about it.

Enter GEORGE SMERDON *hurriedly, without knocking.*

Good powers! You again, George? Was ever such a cruel, obstinate man?

GEORGE. You'll have to keep open house to-day, Mr Sweetland. The people will swarm like bees to wish you joy.

SWEETLAND. Why,—be you a white witch? Not a soul knows it yet but me and Miss Dench. 'Tis only five minutes old.

GEORGE. Oh yes, they do! I met Richard Coaker not a minute agone.

ARAMINTA. He don't know it, George.

GEORGE. *He* don't know it! [*Staring.*] If he don't know your Sibley is tokened to him, who should?

SWEETLAND. Sibley—not Petronell?

GEORGE. Certainly not Petronell. Lord help the man who looks at Petronell when I'm about. And all true friends must come to wish Sibley joy. So here I be again.

SWEETLAND. Sibley! Think o' that, Araminta. What a world!

GEORGE. She's down in the garden along with Miss Thirza Tapper.

Enter ASH *with a faggot of green stuff. He leaves it near door.*

SWEETLAND. Come on, then, George. We mustn't let Miss Tapper go for a minute. There's more news

flying about yet, I believe. [*To* ARAMINTA.] Don't you forget now. I be set on it. I will have it so.

[*Exeunt* SAMUEL SWEETLAND *gaily with* GEORGE SMERDON. ARAMINTA *stands staring before her, and takes no notice of* ASH.

ASH. There—though why the Almighty should like for our hedge-clippings to go into His Holy House, I can't see. What's happened? You've got him into a good temper again. You always do.

ARAMINTA. I hope I always shall.

ASH. 'Tis only because you agree with him. You ought to withstand him more.

ARAMINTA. The master's going to wed in earnest.

ASH. Never! Catched that woman to Dawlish after all?

ARAMINTA. Catched a woman, but not to Dawlish.

ASH. God befriend me and you then. To think of another female in this house!

ARAMINTA. She's no stranger, Churdles.

ASH. From this place?

ARAMINTA. Yes; a common, everyday object, you might say. In fact, I be the woman, Churdles Ash. I've took him.

ASH. [*Indicating utter astonishment.*] You! Go on!

ARAMINTA. Solemn truth. He's offered, and I was proud to answer 'yes.'

ASH. Jimmery! They say as the next best thing to no wife be a good one. He's come out top at last.

ARAMINTA. 'Tis a great advancement for a simple creature like me.

ASH. I'll be your side. I'll help you with the man.

ARAMINTA. I know you will.

ASH. Yes—sense alive you'll find me. If I had a threepenny piece for every bit of sense I speak, I'd be so rich as George Smerdon this minute. You'll get to his ear now. Don't you forget to tell him I'm cruel underpaid, Minta. But there—of course you'll be the 'Missis' in future and 'Minta' no more. [*A double knock at the door.*

ARAMINTA. [*Going to the door.*] 'Twill make no difference at all, Churdles Ash.

ASH. [*Going.*] You wait till you feel the whip in your hand and find yourself reigning over us! I daresay you'll be a proper slave-driver then, and instead of doing other people's work, you'll make 'em do yours.

[*Knock at the door. Exit* CHURDLES ASH. ARAMINTA *admits* HENRY COAKER.

MR COAKER. The master in, Minta?

ARAMINTA. Why, Uncle, you *are* a stranger! Yes, he's in. I'll fetch him.

MR COAKER. I've been busy for him. 'Tis a time for his friends to help the man.

ARAMINTA. Like your kind heart.

Enter SWEETLAND.

SWEETLAND. What did I tell you, Minta?

ARAMINTA. I'm going—I ain't forgot.

MR COAKER. Morning, neighbour! Bid Miss Dench to be off, will 'e? [*Exit* ARAMINTA.] I've heard this sad tale of your misfortunes, and I've put my shoulder to the wheel for 'e, and I've found her.

SWEETLAND. Found who, Uncle?

MR COAKER. A wife for you, my dear. I'm told you've been going round to the highways and hedges wanting to give yourself away with a pound of tea—and none would touch you with a pair o' tongs?

SWEETLAND. They say that, do they?

MR COAKER. And women as plentiful as gooseberries still—and mostly as sour. But there's a few sweet ones left, Samruel Sweetland, and I've found the pick of the basket for 'e, so don't you be downcast no more. Cheer up! Why, a young man like you might see a couple more wives out yet.

SWEETLAND. You're a friend indeed, Henry! And who might she be?

MR COAKER. A very nice woman indeed—if it weren't for her voice and her looks. But a squint won't spoil her usefulness, and you'll break her temper in a month. A proper terror for work she is, not young, nor yet old. In a word, Nelly Gurney, to Dunston Mill. I've sounded the damsel very crafty and she's quite willing to change her state. She rose like a trout at a fly.

SWEETLAND. A very passable creature too. Minta called her a deal board with a conscience, I remember.

MR COAKER. Well, 'tis bitter clear, by all accounts,

the females ain't tumbling over each other to marry you, Samuel; and whether Nelly's a deal board or not, she's a female.

SWEETLAND. A female, no doubt; but you'd hardly call her a woman, Uncle?

MR COAKER. Then you don't want her, and my trouble's wasted. She'll be terrible disappointed.

SWEETLAND. No, no! 'Tis like your kindness, but I haven't no use for Nelly. And you shall hear why in a minute. I'm very proud to hear Nelly could take me, however. I'm grateful for that. And I'm grateful to you, my old dear.

[*Knock at door.*

MR COAKER. I meant well, Samuel.

SWEETLAND. So you did; and to reward you I'll ask you to stay and hear my great news, Henry.

MR COAKER. You mean your Sibley and Richard? Dick's told me. Sibley was always a pet of mine. She's got a heart, that girl. [SWEETLAND *opens door and admits* MARY HEARN.] Postmistress!

MISS H. To see dear Mr Sweetland.

SWEETLAND. You run in the garden, Uncle. I'll call 'e in a minute.

MR COAKER. I ain't so sure. You mind what happened last time you two was left together. Don't you take no liberties, Samuel, or she'll—ha, ha, ha!

[*Exit* HENRY COAKER.

SWEETLAND. And what might you want, Miss Hearn?

MISS H. Speak kindly. Forget the past, dear Mr Sweetland.

SWEETLAND. I'm going to—just so quick as ever I can—be sure o' that.

MISS H. Call me Mary.

SWEETLAND. [*Starts.*] You don't mean —?

MISS H. I've brought cruel bad news for you. A telegram. I took it off the wires myself, and I wouldn't have nobody else see it, so I carried it up. The lady at Dawlish—Mrs Mercy Bassett. She's changed her mind about you. There's no mercy for you in that quarter—poor man.

[*Gives him a telegram.*

SWEETLAND. What the mischief do you mean?

MISS H. She's changed her mind—that's all. You think you're engaged to be married?

SWEETLAND. And if I do?

MISS H. Well—you ain't; she's gone back on you.

SWEETLAND. [*Reading telegram.*] "Have reconsidered my answer. Mercy."

MISS H. It's off, you see. But don't you mind, Samuel. There was one you wanted more than Mercy Bassett—not so long ago. And if this here widow can change her mind, because she's a fool, somebody else can, because she's a wise woman.

SWEETLAND. But you don't understand, Mary. [*Flourishing telegram.*] This means——

MISS H. Never mind what it means. Just you throw your memory back to Tapper's tea-party and what I did and said. It was her beastly coffee upset my nerves. I turned you down and I'm sorry for it. Other people can reconsider their answers besides Mercy Bassett. Don't look at me

like that—I'm all blushes, Samuel. And I'll never show temper again—never!

SWEETLAND. Good powers! You want me?

MISS H. I want to make you a happy man, if I can.

SWEETLAND. You have! You have, Mary!

MISS H. Don't you speak all of a minute. Take your time.

Enter MISS TAPPER.

SWEETLAND. You shall hear my answer afore you go.

MISS T. Sibley thought you would be alone now.

SWEETLAND. [*Staring at her.*] My conscience, you too? You ain't going to . . . ? Just you wait here. I want to tell Miss Dench something. Back in half a minute. [*Takes paper out of his pocket and scans it.*] Things are looking up, ladies!

[*Exit* SWEETLAND *to house.*

MISS H. He ain't quite himself. A bit light-headed. He's had an ugly knock—and then a bit of good news on top of it.

MISS T. Good-morning, Mary. I hope you've quite recovered from that dreadful attack at my little affair?

MISS H. It was something I ate.

MISS T. [*Stiffly.*] It was certainly nothing you ate—unless you ate too much.

MISS H. There wasn't no fear of that.

MISS T. Your nerves want attention probably.

Miss H. Yes, you often get weak nerves with extra good brains. But the dratted men are jealous of women's intellects and keep us clever ones down. They're nasty wretches—men are—where women are concerned.

Miss T. There are good men and bad men.

Miss H. Oh yes—there's good and bad. I know that quite as well as you do—perhaps better. I might have been a wife myself if I'd liked. I may be in a man's arms yet before I'm much older.

Miss T. Try to be more reticent and dignified. It's very vulgar to speak of such sacred things in jest, even to a fellow-woman.

Miss H. Hoity-toity! Grapes are sour, perhaps? I'd like to see the man that wanted you, anyway. Nasty they may be, but they're not born fools.

Miss T. You low-minded wretch! You shameless minx! To think that a department of the Civil Service is in your hands! But know this—if only in honour of my dear father's memory—I, too, might have been a wife—the wife of a high-minded and most worthy man.

Miss H. [*Excited.*] Easy to talk, but let's hear who 'twas. The Lord of the Manor, perhaps; or the Bishop of Exeter? They'd fly afore you—they'd call on the hills to cover 'em afore you. [Miss Hearn's *excitement increases.*] Thirza Trapper you ought to be called; but cunning though you may be, you'll never catch a man. Tell out his name and let's hear who went 'nap' on you! Names, names, you pinnicking little grey rat!

[*She sways forward at* MISS TAPPER, *then sits down and begins to laugh very loud.*

Enter SWEETLAND *and* SIBLEY.

SWEETLAND. Hullo! That laugh again!

MISS H. I'm only laughing at the Vicar's pet. Here's the men all running to marry her, she says. [*Laughs wildly.*

SWEETLAND. Ladies! Ladies! Ain't you old enough to know better? Here, take Miss Hearn in the garden and give her a ripe pear, Sibley, and calm her down. I've got something to tell her presently.

MISS H. Ah! And don't you let Tabby Tapper go till she's heard it. [*Exit with* SIBLEY.

MISS T. Appalling woman! It's only charitable to assume she's mad.

SWEETLAND. She's sane enough. She's like a lot more; she's found out which side her bread was buttered—too late.

MISS T. I've sought this opportunity to tell you how indignant I felt. That such a woman should dare to suggest . . . And looking back at those emotional moments—just before my little affair—I feel I dismissed you too abruptly, dear Mr Sweetland. I didn't choose my words well, I didn't——

SWEETLAND. Stop! stop! There's a time for everything, Thirza, and when the time's passed it never comes back.

Miss T. I merely meant——

Sweetland. I don't blame you—I don't blame anybody. I welcome it—for Minta's sake. We often only value a thing when we find everybody else wants it. Take this telegram. Here's Mercy Bassett changed her mind also. Wouldn't look at me yesterday—crying for me to-day. But she's got to hear the bitter words 'too late.' And not only her seemingly. You must bear up. You must all bear up. [*At window.*] Good's truth! If there ain't Widow Windeatt! That's the limit! It only wanted her. [*Takes out paper.*] Why, that's the whole boilin' of 'em! A proper man-hunt this is!

Enter Sibley *and* Petronell *with* Louisa Windeatt. *They are followed by* Mr Valiant Dunnybrig *and* Richard Coaker. Mr Dunnybrig *and the widow are dressed in hunting attire, and she has evidently had a bad fall. She is smeared with earth, her face is dirty, her habit is torn and her hat is crushed, but she is quite cheerful.*

Dunnybrig. Any port in a storm! Here's the poor dear been throwed over a hedge on Honeybag Down, and but for God's mercy must have broke her neck.

Louisa. I'm all right. Nothing's broke. 'Tis only a shake-up.

Sibley. Where's Minta, father?

Sweetland. Ah! 'tis always 'Where's Minta?' when man, woman or child's in trouble. Ever ready

to spread her wings and fly to help. But she's busy on my account just now.

SIBLEY. Come to my room, dear Louisa.

LOUISA. A sponge down and a couple of pins will put me right in a jiffy.

[*Exit* SIBLEY, *followed by* MRS WINDEATT.

SWEETLAND. And a drink you must have. All of you must drink. There's something to drink about, I promise you.

[*Gets glasses and pours out cherry brandy.*

DUNNYBRIG. Drink a thanksgiving that she be spared. A terrible near thing, neighbour. Brave as a lion, that woman, and rides like a fairy. 'Twas her new hoss with a damned tricky temper. She'd go over a house; but if a horse tears at a fence and refuses and goes stuck dead, what can you do? Gone, like the last rose of summer, she was—and all the world saw her—trousers. 'Tis a blessed escape, and I'll gladly drink.

SWEETLAND. Pour out—pour out then. I'll get some more glasses. You've started, I see, Miss Tapper! That's Miss Dench's cherry brandy, and you won't get better in this world—or the next. Here's my Sibley hitched up to Dick Coaker for a start, and then——

DUNNYBRIG. Well done, Dick! Here's luck to the pair of 'e.

Enter SIBLEY *and* MRS WINDEATT.

DUNNYBRIG. There she is—fresh as paint! Drink

up, Louisa; and then another. And thank the watching Lord you're here to do it.

[*Gives* MRS WINDEATT *a glass.*

SWEETLAND. [*With his hands on the shoulders of* PETRONELL *and* SIBLEY.] Bless you both! But that ain't all. You haven't heard what's happened to your father yet. Wonders in the land, I promise you.

Enter CHURDLES ASH, *followed by* MISS HEARN, HENRY COAKER *and* GEORGE SMERDON.

ASH. The hoss be all right. He's as sorry for his sins as a hoss can be.

[PETRONELL *goes to* GEORGE SMERDON.

SWEETLAND. Drink, Miss Mary Hearn; take your lap with the rest. The painful truth is that a few of us—to name no names—have missed our market during the last week or two. 'Twill be a lesson to the losers to make up their minds a bit sharper another time.

PETRONELL. Come here, George, I want to talk to you, please.

GEORGE. I'm always ready to hear sense, Petronell.

[*Exeunt* PETRONELL *and* GEORGE *to garden.*

MR COAKER. You don't talk like a defeated man, Sweetland.

MISS. H. Tell 'em you're a conqueror, Samuel.

SWEETLAND. I'm going to, Mary, I'm going to. Is everybody here? [*Goes to the door and shouts.*] Be you coming down house, Miss Dench? Ah! here she is—like the Queen of Sheba!

Enter ARAMINTA DENCH, *transformed. She wears rather a garish gown and has made her hair look nice. She appears ten years younger.*

MISS T. A stranger?

ASH. Stranger be damned! 'tis our Miss Dench.

SIBLEY. My darling Minta!

SWEETLAND. Not 'Minta' to nobody but me. Not 'darling' to nobody but me. 'Tis Miss Araminta Dench of Applegarth Farm, neighbours, and she's done me the honour . . . in a word . . .

[MARY HEARN *makes her well-known dreadful noise and sits down on the faggot of green stuff* ASH *brought in.*

MR COAKER. No good, postmistress. You're down and out.

SWEETLAND. My wife to be. And I want her to know, here in this company of fine women, that she ain't the only one who'd take me to-morrow. I want her to know I might have a proper Turkish harum-scarum o' women if I weren't a God-fearing Christian man. I say it, Minta, so as you shall see you wasn't alone in your opinion after all. I say it to honour your judgment. And now—now you'll be my wife, so soon as the Reverend Tudor can make you. And if anybody knows a woman with a gentler heart, and a straighter back, and a nobler character this side of Plymouth, I'd very much like to see her.

SIBLEY. They don't—they don't, father!

LOUISA. That they don't!

MR COAKER. A proper working Christian—as I've always said.

MISS T. There's none like dear Miss Dench.

SWEETLAND. Too good—far too good for such a foolish man as me.

ARAMINTA. None's too good for you. I'm properly proud to wed you, Samuel; and I'll do my very bestest.

MR COAKER. [*Pointing out of window.*] Ha—ha! Three weddings in sight, souls—three weddings under one roof; and some pretty eating and drinking for all of us, please God!

[SIBLEY *embraces* ARAMINTA *and kisses her.* VALIANT DUNNYBRIG, GEORGE SMERDON, RICHARD COAKER *and* HENRY COAKER *shout and wave their hats.* CHURDLES ASH *fans the* POSTMISTRESS, *where she sits on the faggot of green stuff.* LOUISA WINDEATT *and* MISS TAPPER *each take a hand of* SAMUEL SWEETLAND.

CURTAIN

FOR SECOND CURTAIN

As before. GEORGE *enters, bringing in* PETRONELL *by the hand. It is clear what has happened.* RICHARD COAKER *slaps* GEORGE SMERDON *on the back and gives him a handshake.* GEORGE *shakes hands with everybody.* SIBLEY *kisses* PETRONELL.

DATE DUE
MAY 21 1941
MAR 16 1942
JUL. 11 1989
STORAGE

Phillpotts
Farmer's Wife

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